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SPICY WESTERN STORIES

OWLHOOTS of GHOST CREEK

by Larry Dunn

I jumped from $18 a week to $50
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by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

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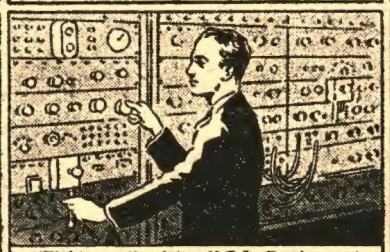

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SPICY WESTERN STORIES

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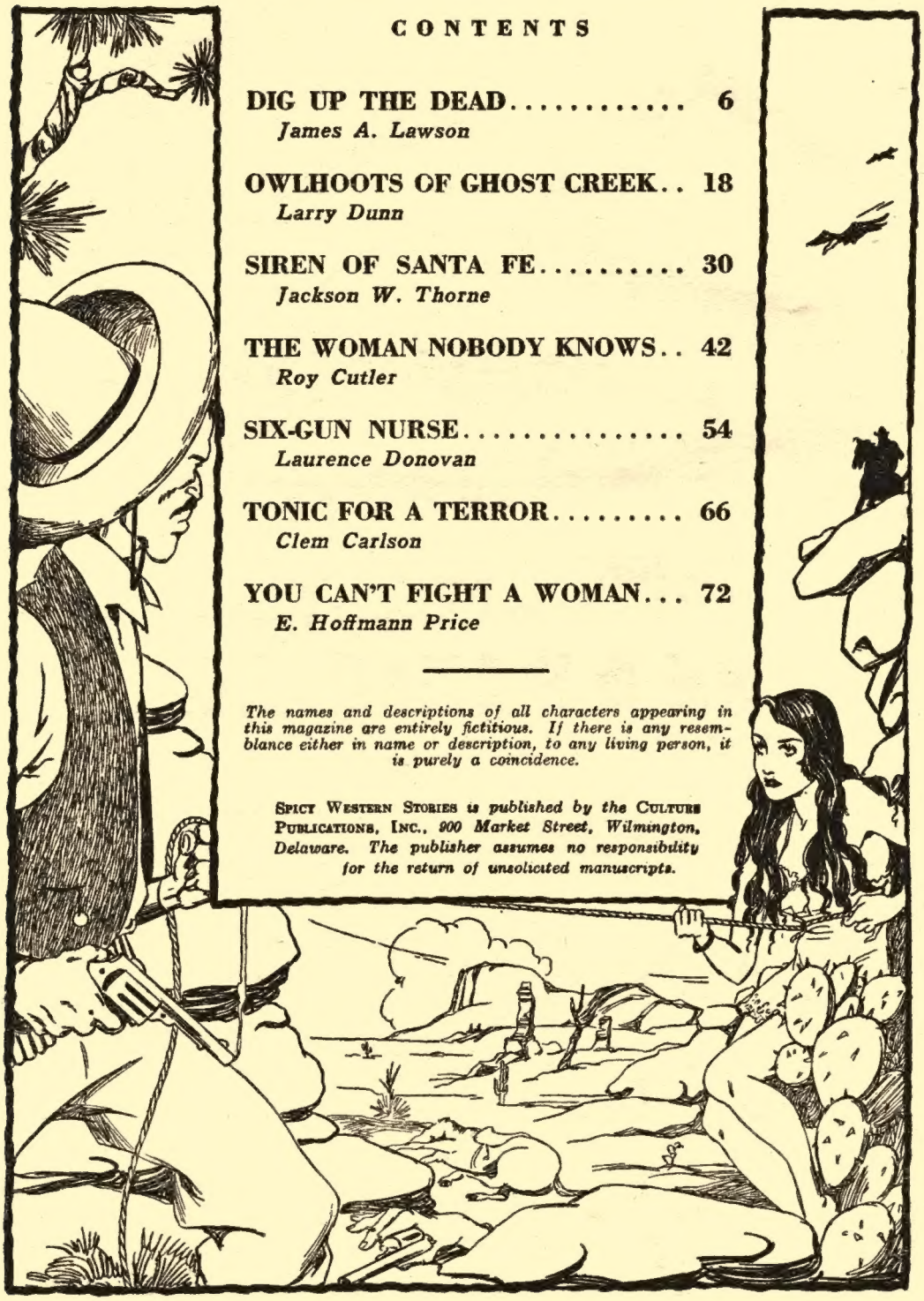

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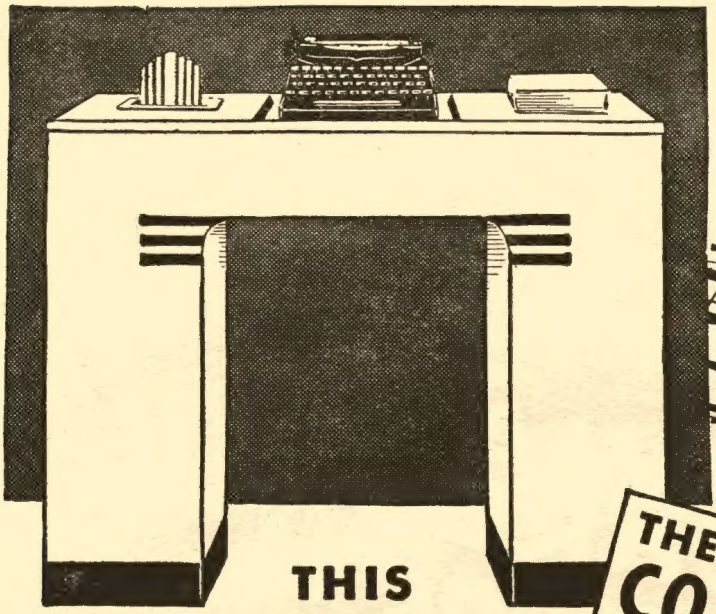

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By JAMES A. LAWSON

BEN HARMONY rode into the sunbaked yard, took his long, loose frame from the saddle, and watered his horse. He put his green eyes to a survey of flat adobe buildings and sheds as he left his mount in the shade of an open shelter.

The sun was brassy, shriveling the bunched *saccaheste* grass on the range. Heat waves made an undulating curtain veiling the purple thrust of the La Sierras del Muerto—Mountains of the Dead—beyond the hop-off point, Adobe City, ten miles away. 'Dobe City, the mountains, the soupy run of the Rio Grande, hell, and Old Mexico. Which about summed it.

Snores emanated from the bunkhouse, reminding Harmony this was siesta hour. From what Harmony had heard before coming here, the owner, old Alamo Carter, couldn't be any more stubborn, headstrong and ornery than he was—even if his siesta was disturbed.

Harmony's lazy grin contrasted whitely with his darkly tanned face

The girl had called him all sorts of names and ordered him to hit the trail. But it wasn't the way of Ben Harmony to take orders from anybody, least of all a little snip of a girl

DIG UP THE DEAD

Barr held the girl as a shield, but still Ben came in.

as he walked along a thick 'dobe wall and came to a heavy gate. The drop of the horseshoe knocker failed to get the response Harmony desired, so he lifted the latch and came on into a patio surrounded by the U-shaped rambling 'dobe house.

Pepper trees drooped listlessly and flies hummed above a lily pool. Harmony headed for a wide door, scuffed boots pulling his spurs along the flags. He was almost to the closed end of the U when he stopped, then turned.

A DOOR opened to his left and down the way he'd come. A muscle jerked at the corner of his mouth and he blinked. It was to his credit he was otherwise undisturbed, for the girl who raised inquiring brows above blue eyes was certainly an unexpected quantity!

Her honey-colored hair haloed a small head held proudly on the column of a slender throat. Under a simple dress of some very thin material, dainty curves were outlined trim and pouty. Harmony hooked a thumb in his cartridge belt, pushed aside the plain, single-action .45 in the cutaway holster, and moved a step to his left. The girl noted his long figure, the worn levis and faded chambray shirt, the floppy hat above his humorous, lazy expressioned, high-cheek-boned face.

Not a word passed between them. The silence was sort of ridiculous. Put them in the class with a couple strange hounds sizing each other up. Harmony moved another step to his left.

The girl was dressed for hot weather, all right! And she likely had forgotten that because of his sudden, uninvited appearance. Harmony squinted. Yep, he had her between himself and the slant of the sunlight, all right enough.

She was shadowed perfection, from trim ankles up along the fine sweep of her legs to rounded hips. As he stared, she frowned. Then, looking down discovered the reason for the intentness of his gaze.

"Ohhh!" she gasped, face and neck going fiery. She stepped hastily into the shadowed doorway and blazed at him.

"You insufferable man! To stand there and look right through me. It's insulting. You might as well have intruded in my bath."

"Uh-uh. I can't stand too much all to once," he declined. "But I'll tell you what: When I get time, I'll come an' take up where we've left off. Right now, I wanta find a ol' rooster whose brand is Alamo Carter."

"Old rooster!" she exclaimed. Three or four varieties of anger boiled in her. It made her mad that he dismissed her so lightly; she was irate also because she didn't feel as annoyed as she might have, had another man seen her like that.

"Alamo Carter is my father. I'm Louene Carter, who is telling you to ride, and don't ever show up here again."

"I aim to see Alamo Carter," he said lazily. "Want me to tell you she's none of y'bus'ness why? Mebbe I want a job."

"Oh." Too sweetly. "How nice. You'll find my father on the range to the East. He'll welcome you with open arms. Please slam the gate so it'll be stuck if you live to show up again."

"He'll welcome me with open arms, eh?" Harmony mused as he got his horse and rode back into the heat waves. "More likely to be closed fists. Still, I ain't figgerin' on playin' bean bags an' slap-my-wrist myse'f! An' if Alamo Carter is a toad, he'll get tromped underfoot."

He thought of the girl and mumbled, "I hope it's true an' Alamo Carter is as honest as they say."

Behind him, Louene Carter was wishing she'd gotten the name of the sandy-haired, green-eyed man. Not that she was interested. She'd just like to meet him once more, and get even with him somehow.

THE roll of the bunch-grassed range gave way to the Eastward swing of the foothills. Rounding a point dotted with dry scrubby cedar trees, Ben Harmony reined up. Voices came thickly through the heat pressure as he moved on carefully.

Two men sat saddle-facing each other. One was a gaunt man who stared stonily at a fattening, red-faced old-timer with gray hair and a gray horsetail mustache.

"Oakes, I'm tellin' you fo' the last time, keep yo'se'f *off* my range with plenty to spare. I ain't accusin' yo' of bein' in with the gun an' contraband runners. But yo' do keep outta their way an' they hit acrost yo' two-bit spread on the trail in an' outta Mexico."

"I ain't no army, Alamo," Tom Oakes growled.

"No, but you could keep yo' eyes open to see things the border men or Rangers might use. Instead, you keep yo' eyes peeled fo' mules, or burros, or mangy hosses them border-hoppers turn loose when they're done with them.

"Half them beasts is got tons of disease spreadin' ticks—fever ticks an' plain damn ticks!—on them. We've had to kill stock, burn range, an' the damn State Livestock an' Range Commission's run me to death! Inspec' this, an' that—bigod! You pick up them lousy strays fo' the few dimes it'll getcha. Then yo' let them critters stray on my range.

"Oakes, keep off. I'll burn powder if I see yo' an' yo' quarantine bait on my stompin' grounds again."

Alamo Carter wheeled his horse. He sounded like a horse snorting when he saw Harmony riding up. "Wal?" he bellowed. "What Dead Mountain bresh trail'd yo' come offa?"

"Stop that ringin' your tail an' pawin' dust," Harmony told him lazily. "I'm just huntin' me a ridin' job."

"Yo' got one!" Carter bawled. "Ride offa my range!"

"Pleasant ol' skunk," Harmony drawled, grinning at Tom Oakes. He chuckled. "I heard you was stubborn an' a bawler an' mebbe a fool, Carter, when I come for a ridin' job. I wouldn't ride for you if you paid me forty a day an' found."

"Skunk!" Alamo Carter roared. "So yo' wouldn't ride fo' me. Bigod, yo' will, then. Yo're hired. So there. An' now damn yo, yo're fired. Hightail it to hell, the both of yo'."

He dropped a big paw toward his gun. Harmony yawned, reined around.

Tom Oakes rode beside him as he headed toward Adobe City.

"What's he riled about?" Harmony demanded, after giving Oakes his brand. The man eyed Harmony suspiciously. Shrugged.

"There's two-three passes through the mountains that go to river crossings to Mexico. I got a little place over here in the foothills nigh one pass, and touching Carter's spread. One, the Mex au-

thorities have closed. The best runs off the Carter ranch.

"Somebody, they say, is runnin' guns to some rebel outfit down there, takin' gold an' silver an' other contraband, along with wet cattle, in pay. Some of them cattle spread disease. The pack animals them runners use—they say, mind you—are let loose. Some of them is diseased. I pick them up, try to rid out the bad ones, and sell the rest."

"To the gunrunners an' border busters," Harmony said easily. Oakes glared briefly. Then, "How the hell I know who buys them for what?"

"Said contrabanders wouldn't mind spreadin' disease to a big outfit that's crampin' their style, so said big outfit would bust an' beat it," Harmony decided. He ignored Oakes' dark look as he untied his tattered brush jacket and donned it, then slipped his legs into a pair of scarred, close-fitting shotgun chaps. Oakes held back as they hit a trail that ran through the chaparral just ahead.

Harmony slowed as he reached the growth of liveoak, manzanita and catclaw. "There's room for both if we squeeze," Harmony drawled. "To ride side-by-side. It's more company to ride like that."

WITHOUT a word, Oakes hit his horse with the hooks and ran into the trail. Harmony ran behind him. He didn't aim to give Mister Oakes a chance to get around a turn, then wait and pop him when he came around.

They broke out of the chaparral a mile from Adobe City—a collection of 'dobe buildings and jacals scattered close to the semi-arid mountains that lay beyond. Oakes called, "Have good luck," and drew on ahead of Harmony.

Pushing his horse through the deep sand, Harmony drew rein inside the wall of a feed corral, saw the animal fed and sheltered under the sloping roof around the inside of the wall and hit across the road at an angle.

The sun shot sunset colors on the silent town. There were men in sight who lounged, eyed the stranger suspiciously, looked after him as he went into the Six-Bits Cantina, the only two-story building—a patched-up collection of logs and adobe—in the town.

Tom Oakes' horse stood in front of the place. Harmony grunted and pushed on in. There were perhaps a dozen men in the Two-Bit. One was having a drink with a Mexican girl. She turned sleepy, dark eyes toward Harmony and smiled. Harmony let his eyes have a snack: taking note of her shapely legs, silk sheathed, that disappeared finally under her short skirt. The swell of her bosom was emphasized by the tight, extreme bodice.

A couple of men were bucking the craps layout. In silence. The drinkers at bar and tables talked in low tones, and everyone stared at Harmony. Adobe City was alive, but darkly, suspiciously, quietly so. Life went on like the life that spawns and works beneath the green scum of a stagnant pool.

Harmony took salt, sluiced down his tequila, sipped water and stood chewing the pathetic slice of lemon that he got with the drink. The peon bartender went around, lighting the dim bracket lamps.

She was dressed for warm weather all right! Ben stood and stared.

Harmony already had spotted Tom Oakes in a corner, back to the wall beside another man. That man was dressed in a "town" sackcloth suit, the pants legs pulled over glovelike shopmade boots. An expensive sombrero was shoved on the back of his head. The man's hair and brows were so tow as to be almost white, and his eyes contained an albino, reddish cast.

His nose was flat and twitched

like a rabbit's above the unlit stogie he held between thin lips. A six-gun rode in a tooled holster on his left hip—but when the man lifted his drink, his narrowing eyes studying Harmony over the glass, he used his beringed right hand.

"So," Harmony said to himself. "By the descriptions I got, that couldn't be nobody but 'Stogie' Barr. A nice one to scare growed girls with an' to keep your face turned toward."

HE WATCHED Oakes, who seemed angry and arguing, but couldn't hear Oakes as he said, "I tell you, Barr, it's worth more than I'm getting. Things are getting hot. There's leaks. A couple times, the Mex authorities have busted things. I ain't playing along much longer, and I want to make mine quick. I had a run in with Carter today. That Harmony—I don't like his looks, even if he told Carter off—heard the ruckus."

"I'll find out about him. Maybe he's just a drifter. Maybe his rumpus with Carter was all put on. We'll learn. As for you, you'll get yours in time. Don't go telling me what you will or won't do. That's all." His voice was flat and without expression—like a corpse speaking.

"I want mine in a hurry!" Oakes snarled, getting up.

"You'll get it," Stogie Barr promised him.

Oakes paused at the bar, got a drink, rolled a smoke and pulled a huge, old-fashioned silver watch from his pocket. He was fond of silver, Harmony guessed. His gun butt was silver chased and he wore a large silver ring. Oakes put the watch back in his pocket and went out.

Harmony turned. Stogie Barr had come up beside him.

"Stranger? Have a drink. . . . A bottle of my private stock, Pablo. . . . Tom Oakes was telling me you heard him have a run-in with Alamo Carter. Hmmn. Don't like to say it, but Oakes is right in wanting to sell his place and leave. Carter is bad."

"He just seemed contrary an' ornery to me," Harmony replied.

"You're a stranger and don't know. I do know. You see, I'm sort of a broker, Mister Harmony. I buy land and cattle, keep the stuff awhile, sell it. Make loans and the like, too. Would you like to buy a place?"

"I ain't got enough money to buy a place. I guessed mebbe I might get a job down here. I ain't particular."

"Well, they tell me it pays to be particular who you ride with," Barr muttered. He downed his drink. And grunted an abrupt "G'bye."

As he strolled out, the Mexican girl left her drinking companion and approached Harmony, who was staring after Barr. He watched the man through the open door of the cantina, saw him pause and speak to a rider who'd just dismounted out there.

The Mexican girl put the pressure of one firm hand on Harmony's arm, leaned meaningly against him and crooned, "You weel buy for Doncia wan dreenk?"

"Sure," Harmony agreed, slipping one arm around her slender waist, his attention still on the man talking to Barr. He made mental note of the fellow's thin, ferretlike

face, the weasel nose over a cruel yet weak mouth. The stock of a rifle showed back of his saddle pommel; he wore a six-gun low and tied.

"Looks like a bad one," Harmony muttered. "Who is he?"

The girl frowned and stared up at him. "You do not know? That wan ees the Ike Tolt, who ees ride the seex-gun for the Carter rancho. And now we dreenk?"

Harmony saw Barr shaking his head. Ike Tolt shrugged, turned and went into a cubbyhole cantina across the street. He came out pretty soon, wiping his lips as he got his horse and left the town.

HARMONY gave his attention to the girl. She had a figure and was pretty, right enough, and he sort of liked the shy manner—at least it was good pretense!—she assumed.

After another drink, she said, "Thees ees not good hour down here. We go outside, to where we are een my room an' have a niiiice dreenk. No?"

"So Barr works 'er this way," Harmony thought, still wondering why Barr could keep a Carter man from remaining in town. He paid for a bottle, turned and said to Doncia, "Sure. You lead the way."

The room was dingy, and the lamp she lit threw dim light. She seemed uncertain as she joined Harmony, who'd eased down on a sagging couch. Then she was beside him, smiling. "You want a dreenk?"

"Naw," he refused, and waited for her next move.

The girl's knee was a warm pressure against him, and now she leaned, put one arm around his neck and lay back in his arms, looking up at him. She crossed her legs and the short ruffled skirt slipped, disclosing tawny skin above high, dark stockings. Garters with huge rosettes peeping at Harmony enhanced the general effect.

"You like Doncia?" She was studying him, her red lips pursed. The swell of her bosom rose and fell as she breathed faster, as though a game suddenly had turned a dangerous, real corner.

Harmony figured he might as well play along. It wouldn't be very hard to do, at that. Maybe he was *mucho loco*—but he couldn't just figure her as the general run of dance-hall girl. No wonder, he guessed: She worked for Stogie Barr, sounding out every stranger who came along.

He gathered her in his arms, bent his head. Her lips parted slightly as he crushed his mouth to hers. It was just another kiss at first. But as their lips clung, her arms tightened as did Harmony's and the kiss became a thing of dynamite.

She pressed herself against him, whimpering in her throat as she moved restlessly. But then suddenly she kicked, tore out of his arms and sat up.

"I do not mean to be so much as that to you!" she protested. "I cannot help her, though, eet seemed. I don't like border buzzards, and—"

"An' in findin' out somethin' for Stogie Barr, y'slipped once," said Harmony huskily. "If it's what y'want to know, I ain't a border hopper."

"Me, I don't fin' nothing for Stogie Barr!" she spat. "I have

watch for a tall, lazy *Tejano*. I theenk you are heem. P'raps?"

"Mebbe?" Warily.

She poured drinks and raised her glass. "I geeve toast. To the herder of goats een the foothills. Once, he ees on the range, now he ees move."

"Oh." Harmony nodded slowly. "I'd like to meet him. Mebbe we can get a good milk an' wool crop?"

"*Si!*" she cried. "Me, I am afraid here. I am, I theenk, maybe suspec'. Tonight I return across them Rio Grande for stay, eef somebody ride a way weeth me, until meet ees herder of goats."

They drank.

AN HOUR later, Doncia and Ben Harmony rode out of the silent town.

They climbed their horses and after another hour had passed, the girl reined left and shortly raised her voice in plaintive Spanish song.

Starlight and faint moonlight showed a brush and pole corral as they came into a little clearing. A small herd of goats startled, moved inside the corral.

A small man in ragged peon's garb stood before a brush shelter. Harmony sniffed as he dismounted. "Juniper," he said. "Never knew it grew in this special part."

The goatherder said, "Some not like the smell. But eet covers smell of goat wheech ees strong for one who but lately has herded them. These leetle patch here ees all the juniper of wheech I know ees on thees mountain."

"I heard of a fella name of Juan Beza who—" Harmony began.

"How strange! Those ees my name. I was about to say I myself one time knew an *hombre* by name. He, eet seem, was one verrr-y especial *hombre* weeth hees United States Custom Service. He was een the city of San Diego of California, but they say he ees ride thees way?"

"Reckon that settles 'er," Harmony said. "Beza, what's news?"

"First, we send Doncia to safety. When I'm move off range to thees mountain, I leave her to try meet you, send you here. Also, she have learn other theengs. Already, our Mexico officers have stopped one crossing of gons, and have stopped blackleg herd from Mexico ruining the range over here. Here, where I have no true authority, but have learn to know Stogie Barr ees the beeg man. If we could prove eet on heem!"

The girl had mounted and now said good-bye, squeezing Harmony's hand in farewell. He found himself wondering if the hand of Louene Carter would be as soft and warm.

WITH the smell of juniper strong in their nostrils, Ben Harmony, of the United States Custom Service, and Juan Beza, of the Government of Mexico, settled for a talk. Distant and faint on the mountain to the North, came sound of animals on the move.

"Your Rangers come, a patrol scatters them devils," Beza said. "But most get away in thees country. Now, we are hurting them at the Rio Grande's other bank. They are in a hurry to clean up because of that. Never, though, does a prisoner know—or weel not tell—who ees beeg man. We prove notheeng on Barr."

Suddenly she kicked, tore out of his arms, and sat up.

"That bunch we hear movin'?" Harmony wondered.

"Weel be scattered when they cross the rio tonight. It is one more shipment I hear of and geeve word to my country. But the men we lose, or keel in the dark. We lose soldiers, too. We stop the beeg man, we stop all."

"An' your bein' around up here ain't healthy," Harmony grunted.

"*Si.* I theenk so too. But," Beza shrugged, "you see how eet ees."

"I'll hang my hat in Adobe City, then," Harmony advised a short time later as he rode away. He didn't go in to town, but sagehenned it that night. He rode into Adobe City after sunup, ate a leisurely breakfast, and stepped out into the street in time to see a creaking wagon lead a little procession into town.

There was a man in the wagon,

blanket covered, his toes turned up. Harmony dismissed him. Riding behind the wagon was Alamo and Louene Carter. Harmony noticed Alamo's holster was empty, his feet tied to his stirrups. His red face was set and he seemed about to explode. Louene rode beside him, her chin high. She glanced down at Harmony, opened her mouth, shut it.

Sheriff Hernandez and Ike Tolt rode back of the Carters. Harmony, as the wagon stopped before the saddle-maker shop that also was the undertaking establishment, followed on foot as Hernandez herded his charges to the 'dobe office and jail.

Hernandez said apologetically, "Senor Carter, this I do not like to do. But the evidence! I get jury for inquest. Meantime you must be in the jail."

Feet freed and dismounted, Carter roared and ran at Ike Tolt. He kicked at Tolt, who leaped aside cursing Alamo. The sheriff grabbed the rancher and pushed him into the jail office. A crowd was collecting. Harmony was pushed inside and then to one side as Stogie Barr busted in.

Carter bristled and swelled at Barr, too. "Yo're a crook, an' yo're back of this," he snarled. "Yo' tried to buy me, bust me, an' yo' insulted Louene. I wasn't hedged up, I'd give yo' another whuppin' worse'n the one yo' got when you caught her an' kissed her that time."

Anger leaped in Harmony. He ached to bust Barr's mouth.

"What's up, Hernandez?" Barr growled, turning his back to Carter.

"This morning, Senor Tolt start for the Carter ranch. He has been drinking and started just before sunup. He find the body of Tom Oakes on the range. The gun, the watch, ring, all them things are gone. It looked so: like somebody think buzzards fix so nobody know Oakes if them things are taken. He come get me. I go, and buzzards not yet are up. I go see Senor Carter. I find Tom Oakes things hid in his barn. Tolt help me hunt."

"Damn yo', Tolt, turnin' on me!" Carter raged. "An' yo' was the one said look around the stables. Bigod—"

"There was bad feeling between Carter and Oakes. Last night, Oakes tried to sell me his place. Was afraid of Carter," Barr said. "Why, hell. Here's a man heard Carter threaten Oakes."

"Senor Harmony? A stranger? Then—"

"Yeah, he threatened him, a'right," Harmony agreed.

Louene Carter glared at him. "You—sneak! With all of you in on this, you think my father has no chance. You can't do this."

"The inquest this afternoon," Hernandez said, and urged Carter toward the cell in the other room. Old Alamo bared his teeth at Harmony.

"Yo're another in on it. Yo' wait'll—Damn yo' all!"

When the old man was locked up, Hernandez informed Harmony he would have to be at the inquest. Harmony nodded. He went out and found himself a place in the shade where he could watch the street.

HE WAS sitting there, apparently asleep, when Ike Tolt rode out of Adobe City, trotting his

horse toward Dead Mountains. He forgot Tolt for the time and tried to figure himself into the picture as it was now painted. He looked up suddenly.

Louene Carter had stepped out of a store and stopped before him. She glared, seemed of a mind to use the quirt hung on her wrist. "My father didn't do this!" she croaked.

She was fighting fear, Harmony knew. He had an ache to take her in his arms and comfort her. He warned instead, "Don't be hatin' me, Miss Carter. Not yet. Your paw ain't finished, even if it does look bad. I had to tell the truth. He—"

"He threatened Oakes, perhaps. But it was bluster. And who are you to tell me not to hate you?"

"I'm mebbe a man who can help you, an' wants to."

She stared down at him, then moved away suddenly. "Damn you," she groaned, "I hate you because I'd like to believe in you."

Harmony ran those words in his mind as he saddled his horse. Maybe Juan Beza had learned something during the night? He put his horse to the mountain trail. A couple miles on, he dropped his hand toward his gun. His own gun-hand down, Ike Tolt came around a bend and stopped, facing Harmony.

"Hi," Harmony greeted.

"Yump," Tolt grunted. "Stranger, what the hell you doing on this trail?"

"None of your damn' bus'ness," Harmony replied. "But it ain't no secret. I got some time 'til the inquest. I aimed to look around, an' it's cooler up here."

"It gets hot up here, too," Tolt growled as he rode on. As he passed Harmony, Harmony's nose twitched, and when Tolt was out of sight, Harmony hurried on.

"He plumb stunk like he'd been wrasslin' juniper trees!" Harmony blasted. "An' Beza's camp's the only place. . . ."

Beza's camp was deserted. Harmony looked in the shelter, then called as he went toward the corral. He stopped in his tracks.

"Harm—ony. *Si,* I don't move."

Harmony moved to his left. The voice sounded again.

"Bigod!" he swore and commenced tearing at a mound of stones covered with juniper boughs. He helped Juan Beza stand and walk to his shelter, and while he bandaged a furrow in Beza's scalp and tied up a bullet hole in his leg, Beza said:

"I'm not see who ees eet. I just come back from hearing one more arms sheepment ees last night stopped," Beza gasped. "I'm told three day ago, move out. They now figured I am spy, an' so after last night . . . Anyhow, gun roars, heets my leg the bullet, then I go dark. I wake up, cannot move from them stone. Then you call."

"An' we'll make another li'l call if y'figger y'can stand 'er, Beza," Harmony snarled. "The skunk who figured you dead, an' piled rock an' juniper on you, is Ike Tolt. I knew he'd been here when I smelt juniper on him."

"But that weel not prove—" Beza began.

"Wait!" Harmony cut in. "Bigod, Beza, I got a idea. Will you take a long chance with me? Can you manage?"

"Me, I'm manage too plenty,"

(Continued on page 82)

OWLHOOTS of

By LARRY DUNN

"SUDDEN" CASSIDY snapped away the quirly he had been inhaling. The smoke tasted as rotten as he felt inside. The stench of dead cows seemed to have misflavored his makin's. He guessed, if he had a soul, it would smell almost as bad to decent folks.

"Quit that damn' moanin'!" he growled at "Mex" Ramo who was riding beside him. "Don't yuh ever feel like a skunk, Ramo? Ain't yuh ever wakin' up in yore bunk hearin'

GHOST CREEK

Kinnard was more than an outlaw chief; he was the only banker in the county. And as such he had forced Sudden Cassidy into an owlhoot job. Maybe he was crazy, bucking Kinnard over a girl—but Sudden figured his six-shooter was as fast as the next man's!

Sudden lashed out with a pistol-whipping blow that laid the banker out flat.

them steers bawlin'? Leastwise, shut off the yowlin'!"

Ramo's white teeth bared in the moonlight. He quit humming some greaser version of "git along little dogies" and grinned wolfishly.

"*Amigo* Sudden ees dream too much of thees *Senorita* Maree," he said meaningly. "Soon Ghost Creek she make the Rancho Estaban green again. Maree weel ride away weeth Keenard, and then—"

And then "*Amigo* Sudden" would have pistol smashed the white teeth back into Mex Ramo's poison mouth, but a clear scream

of terror shrilled from the patio of the hacienda lying a hundred yards or so below them. One scream only, and it was a girl's voice. There was but one girl at the Rancho Estaban, Mary Harden. And between her and whatever might happen to a frail, lovely creature so tempting to the eye and the imagination was only her dying brother, Joe Harden.

"C'mon, Ramo!" grated Sudden Cassidy. "Mebbe yuh've still got some decency in yore stinkin' heart! Rust Kinnard ain't gittin' away with nothin' like that!"

SUDDEN'S big Mexican spurs roweled his roan gelding and the horse started springing forward. But Mex Ramo was quick. His pinto made a jump and his brown hand shot to the reins of the grulla.

"One beeg fool, *amigo!*" snarled the Mex. "Keenard savvy and ees tell Ramo to stop—"

"Yuh filthy greaser!" gritted Sudden, his rawhide body snapping around as fast as a whiplash. "So Keenard ees tell yuh, huh?"

Sudden knew he should have slapped out an iron and busted Ramo's skull permanent, but the cayuses were plunging. So he slammed a hard fist with all the force of his lanky arm. Ramo's nose squashed flat on his greasy face and his squat body lifted clear of the saddle. He hit and somersaulted and didn't come to his feet.

"An' if I've busted yore damn' neck, that's all right with me!" muttered Sudden, as his mount went down the slope toward the woven ocotillo fence that surrounded the hacienda.

THE Arizona moon made desert silver light, in which every moving object leaped out as distinctly as though it were day. It was four o'clock in the morning and the sun would rise in another hour. There should not have been a yellow square of lamplight in the window of the bedroom that belonged to Mary Harden, but it was there.

Three saddled horses were tied to the corral poles inside the ocotillo barrier of thorns. A low, wide porch ran around the outside of the hacienda. Sudden ignored the gate in the ocotillo, some distance to one side, and put his horse over the woven spikes.

Because of the dryness, it being weeks since Ghost Creek had run with water for the Rancho Estaban, the pony's hoofs landed without sound in muffling alkali sand. The animal fell to its knees and Sudden went on with a twisting spring of his lanky body that placed him on his feet.

He stroked the smooth walnut of a six-gun stock as he ran forward soundlessly toward the lighted window. The steely voice of hawk-nosed Rust Kinnard floated out.

"Yuh be good tuh me, an' maybe Ghost Creek will water yore ranch again, honey," said Kinnard. "If I git t' like yuh, we might even git hitched proper."

Sudden swore between clenched teeth, for Mary Harden's strained, sweet voice took him back when she replied.

"If I could trust you, Rust Kinnard, I'd do it save Joe," she was saying desperately. "You've got me, anyway, and nothing matters but Joe's chance to get well.

It's too late to save any of the cows and all our money's gone. Will you promise—?"

"The pore, little fool!" said Sudden Cassidy huskily in his throat. "Well, bigod! Now I kin git some of the rottenness out'n my own innards!"

His six-gun rasped leather and came to a steady line. But he had the sense to hesitate long enough to consider. Two of Kinnard's other owlhoots were with him, or their horses wouldn't be here? Mex Ramo probably would have come out of it and be skulking along behind him?

If he gunned Kinnard cold, he probably wouldn't survive to be of any further use to Mary? And as rotten as he felt he had become, Sudden never had gunned another hombre down without giving him a chance to draw.

So he crouched outside the window, thumb itching along the hammer of the Colt. He couldn't help but pull in a long breath and feel his back muscles grow cold and squirm with appreciation. For Mary Harden was plumb fascinating in the clinging white nightie that caressed every lovely contour from near her knees to her throbbing throat.

She was standing with the low, single bed between her and Rust Kinnard's bulky figure. Her brown hair streamed to her waist and her flower-like face was uplifted with red-lipped petals making a quivering mouth. Sudden could see Kinnard's tongue licking at his rat-trap lips as his black eyes gleamed with avid intent.

"Yuh got some sense," said Kinnard. "An' it might as well be here an' now. Mebbe I'll be gittin' some cows fer yuh t' restock when the creek runs again."

"Oh, please—please!" pleaded Mary suddenly, desperately. "Not now—not until I know you'll keep your word—not with Joe asleep in the house—I'll do what you say, if you'll wait—"

Kinnard's reply was a low, coarse laugh. "An' if'n yuh don't, yore brother mightn't ever wake up—"

He strode around the end of the bed, and one hand caught the thin night gown, brushing it off her smooth shoulder. For the minute, Sudden Cassidy was stunned by the lovely girl's apparent submission. He heard her say, "Oh, if you'll keep your word—please—please—"

SOMETHING snapped inside Sudden Cassidy.

"Kinnard!" he rasped sharply. "Turn around! Git yore irons off that chair! I'm waitin'!"

Mary's small hand went to her red lips, with its back pressed to her white teeth, stifling the scream that wanted to come. Kinnard's abrupt turn, his hard oath told Sudden there could be nothing but a fatal showdown now. And damned if he didn't feel a warm glow inside, the first decency since he had become one of Rust Kinnard's owlhoots welling through his veins.

"Sudden? Yuh locoed fool!" Kinnard mouthed his words, turning. "Put down that smoke pole! No owlhoot ever bucked me an' lived!"

That was what he was. Sudden Cassidy, one of Rust Kinnard's

own owlhoots. For Kinnard was more than an outlaw chief. He was the only banker in the county. As such he had crowded Sudden Cassidy on a short term note, and Sudden had the choice of sacrificing his own small S-C spread or doing Kinnard's bidding.

The first owlhoot job had been something of a pleasure. For it had been the diversion of Ghost Creek back in the mountain hogbacks and the drying up of the Estaban rancho. The Estaban spread took up nearly two sections of land in the valley watered by the creek. Don Estaban had prospered in the valley and built this rambling hacienda.

But, as Sudden Cassidy had looked at it then, Don Estaban was a "furriner." There had been more than suspicion that Don Estaban had used his Ghost Creek pastures to cover up the running of rustled stock across the border. So Sudden had thrown in with Rust Kinnard and his hirelings without any qualms of conscience.

Later had come the real idea in the croooked mind of Kinnard. The control of Ghost Creek was simple enough. A big gate dam in the hills could send its water down a side canyon, or back onto the Estaban rancho. The water had been returned after Don Estaban had been driven out.

The ranch had been sold to Mary Harden and her sick brother for their lifetime savings. Now the water of Ghost Creek had been diverted again. Kinnard was preparing to take back the spread and sell it to another rich easterner. After Mary Harden, Kinnard had found another young woman who was soon to come to Arizona and take over the big ranch.

Della Courtney was the high-flown name of the new prospect. Sudden had learned that only the day before.

So when Kinnard rapped out, "No owlhoot ever bucked me an' lived," Sudden Cassidy could not deny to himself that he was what Kinnard had called him. But Kinnard was going for his guns on the chair and the half-naked Mary Harden was standing as transfixed and rigid as a beautiful, white statue.

"B'rang!"

IT WAS a ringing single shot. It came with a stab of blue flame and smoke from an inner door. Rust Kinnard spun half around, catching at his shoulder. Young Joe Harden, hollow-eyed and weak, was in the doorway, a smoking iron in his hand. Kinnard cursed and made a new grab for his guns.

"Git out, Joe!" shouted Sudden, heaving himself over the low window sill. "Take Mary, grab hosses, an' ride like the devil was on yore tail! I'll pick yuh up!"

As she was, the thin nightgown revealing the flash of her beautiful, slender legs as she darted toward her brother, Mary was an eyeful that would have hypnotized Sudden at any other time. But Sudden had no time for thinking about that right now.

Kinnard's gun was in his left hand, swinging up, when Sudden slashed around with a pistol-whipping blow that laid open the banker-outlaw's chin and knocked him flat. Sudden's knee hit the table

He ripped at her dress. "Bigod! I'll beat the livin' lights outa yuh!"

and the oil lamp crashed and went out.

But a hard voice bellowed in the open window behind him, an iron exploded. Sudden imagined for the instant that his spine had been split wide open, for the slug struck him in the back above the level of his hips. But it couldn't have been his spine, for he was able to drop to the floor, squirm around and plaster the square of the window opening with lead.

He had the satisfaction then of hearing a squawking groan and guttural, choking oaths in Mex. So it was Mex Ramo he had gunned. Other voices were yelling and Kinnard's other two owlhoots were clumping toward the window on the porch.

One owlhoot emitted a warning cry. "Look over thar! It's the dang' gal! They're takin' the hosses!"

Sudden's hips and legs were numbed and he was still believing he had collected a backbone breaker, but he managed to roll toward the doorway where Mary and Joe had disappeared. As he did he heard the quick pounding of hoofs and a gun whammed a couple of times on the porch.

Mary Harden screamed, but her cry diminished, and Sudden knew she must be on one of the running horses. One of the owlhoots swore vilely and said, "Laid out her damn' brother, but them three hosses'll run themselves t' hell an' gone! Hi, Burt! Grab Sudden's nag an' pick up the gal 'fore she gits into the malpais!"

SUDDEN groaned. Mary's brother had been gunned down. And the girl had headed desperately for the trackless desert badlands, instead of hitting the trail toward Gila, the county seat town. Then he judged the scared horses must be running away, otherwise the girl would not have gone without her brother.

Sudden discovered he could stand. Then he pulled his cartridge belt around and found a dented concha where he had thought a slug had drilled him. Kinnard was still quiet on the floor. Sudden went back out of the window and saw Mex Ramo sprawled out. He had become a good greaser with a death slug through him.

Sudden was halfway to his gelding when one of the owlhoots started to swing into the saddle. Not wanting to risk hitting his horse, Sudden triggered both guns, the bullets scooping the ground at the owlhoot's feet. The gelding made a quick jump, threw off the hombre and Sudden was in the saddle before the Kinnard pair could heat up their irons.

Sudden left the hacienda the same way he had arrived, over the spiky ocotillo. He saw Mary's brother lying in a grotesque huddle close to the horse corral. Guns whanged behind him and his gelding put on speed as lead flicked his rump.

Sudden knew the outlaws and Kinnard would be several minutes finding saddles and getting them on other cayuses. He headed by guess into the desert, and was glad now that Mary Harden had gone into the malpais. For she would have been caught on the way to Gila, or in the town that Kinnard bossed with a lawless hand.

ONE minute, it was still chilly in the moonlight, and the next minute a blazing red sun came smoking up. Sudden was in the baking sink inhabited only by lizards, buzzards and rattlers, with an occasional deadly gila monster to enliven the scene. In ten minutes heat waves were dancing over brown and yellow rocks.

Sudden cast about for trail sign, but found none. He was thinking

of the lovely Mary Harden, clad only in her thin nightie. Doubtless she was completely lost and helpless. She must have known her brother had been killed, and she had been unable to stop the runaway horses.

"Bigod!" groaned Sudden. "Even if Kinnard and them other buzzards don't catch her up, she won't last two hours in this inferno! The nags'll run themselves out an' she ain't got a chance!"

The sky was becoming brassy and Sudden's own lips were drying and beginning to crack. The Estaban rancho had been lost to view when the sun popped up. Sudden could only be thankful he had seen no signs of Kinnard's pursuit. He thought possibly the owlhoot leader might well be satisfied, knowing the girl would perish. And there was her brother's body to be disposed of.

"Kinnard'll put out that they both lost theirselves in the malpais sink," muttered Sudden. "An' then he'll swing the gate on Ghost Creek an' bait them pastures for this other damfool gal from the East. Della Courtney, huh? One o' the dude kind with dinero an' no savvy. If I kain't save Mary—"

Sudden shivered, as hot as he was, thinking of Mary's white perfection becoming parboiled torture. His gelding had slowed, but he kept him circling and hitting every spot of higher ground. Nothing impeded his view except the dipping arroyos. There were only Paloverdes and scrawny desert willows where there weren't mesquite and creosote bushes.

Then Sudden saw Mary, and she had lost the horses. For she was beside a huge Bisnaga, her tattered night gown streaming in the steady desert wind. Against the dark green of the barrel cactus, she was a white, living image. In spite of the desperate plight of the girl, her curved perfection started Sudden's pulses pounding. Since he had been hooked up with the Kinnard outfit, Sudden had kept his conscience clean when it came to decent women critters.

He swore at himself. "Yuh git her out'n here, an' yuh use what dinero yuh've saved t' send her back East, an' then yuh high-tail fer others parts, Sudden Cassidy," he exhorted himself. "Yuh've got only one other chore. Yuh head off that damfool Della Courtney 'fore she gits the Gila stage down at Crook Elbow."

HE WAS sending his tired nag down through an arroyo toward Mary Harden. As the ground dipped, she was lost to his view for a few seconds. He emerged only a few yards away, and was about to shout. But he reined up the gelding, clamped his teeth shut and whipped out a six-gun. The girl's face was turned from him and she seemed trying to stay in what shade was cast by the huge Bisnaga.

Sudden steadied the six-gun, pulling back the hammer. For the sun had gleamed upon a slimy gray length with black diamond spots. A big rattler was slowly coiling up against the barrel cactus within two feet of the girl's bare and lovely legs.

Mary Harden screamed hysterically when Sudden triggered the gun three times. She whirled and

perhaps she failed to see the writhing length of the snake that had been chopped by Sudden's bullets. And she no doubt saw Sudden's shooting and his appearance as a new threat from a Kinnard outlaw.

"Wait!" yelled Sudden. "I'm yore *amigo!* Wait!"

But as she had screamed, the bewildered and terror-filled girl was darting away. Her small feet were bare and desperation made her quick. She sprang onto a clutter of yellow rocks close by, climbing with total disregard for her scanty gown. Sudden shouted at her again and roweled the gelding.

All in the same instant, Sudden saw Mary throw up her hands and heard the vicious crack of a rifle. Mary started falling. The shot had come from some distance. The way the lovely girl pitched headlong to the sharp rocks below her, Sudden knew her skull was broken and that the rifle bullet had drilled her fatally.

"The damn', yeller-bellied skunks!" he grated, sinking the steel in the gelding's sides, and thumbing back the hammers of both six-guns.

And before the horse could make two jumps a second rifle whanged. Sudden saw the blood on his horse's mane just forward of the saddle horn, and he tried to twist in the saddle to spot the new gulcher. But his horse squealed with pain, sunfished and swapped ends so fast that Sudden was caught off balance.

Even as he was falling head down, Sudden had a glimpse of a rider on a spotted paint pony, and the rider was centering a rifle upon him for a finishing shot: Then the impact of a flat rock seemed to tear his head from his shoulders, and for all Sudden could tell the death slug had been fired.

"PLEASE, God, don't let him die!" a strained voice was saying as Sudden Cassidy's ears functioned again. "Oh, I made an awful mistake! If I'd only seen that snake he killed before I shot at him! Please, don't make me a murderer!"

Sudden's fogged senses made him imagine for a few seconds that he had been mistaken about Mary being dead. Then his eyelids rasped open over dry and burning eyeballs and he was looking into the face of an angel. So it must be him that was dead?

No. She was still talking and she was shielding his face from the sun by cuddling his aching head in her arms. The intimacy of contact made by one ear and the luscious view he had of a rounded throat and the white curves that lay below in an opened wool shirt caused Sudden to wish he didn't have to speak or move.

The girl's hair was so black and soft that it made a cloudy halo around her dusky face. And if it hadn't been for the wideness of her brown eyes and the creamy whiteness of her skin, Sudden wold have imagined she was a Mex. Her lips were a natural and vivid red, and Sudden knew he had never seen any girl before as pretty as she was.

"Can you hear me?" she said softly. "Try to drink this, please. You must live, because I never could forget it if you didn't."

Sudden swallowed a bitter-sweet

"Wait!" Sudden yelled as he triggered the gun and blasted the snake. "I'm yore amigo! Wait!"

liquid. He realized instantly that this girl must be the daughter of some desert prospector or some squatter in one of the few verdant canyons. For she had broken down the Bisnaga, the barrel cactus. And in spite of its steely spines, she had churned its pulp with a mesquite stick until it yielded a pint or so of warm but welcome water.

Only a desert rat could have taught her that. Sudden felt strength flowing into his numbed limbs, and the warm roundness of the lap upon which a shoulder and arm were pillowed all at once became a mightier tonic than the drink she had given him. If he could only think of some way to avoid having to move from this position?

But she had seen his eyes open wider, and a warm flush suddenly tinged the white throat so close to him. She hastily started to release her arms and Sudden just as hastily reached up, pulled her head down and kissed her full upon the lips.

"Why, you shammin' skulker!" she cried, as she pulled her face to one side. "If this wasn't all so terrible, I'd think you've been making a fool of me. I don't believe—"

This time he locked her tight in both arms and said, "In a minute I'll be comin' to my rightful senses, an' find out yuh ain't anything but a part of a danged mirage. So—"

"A mirage?" she murmured, and this time she was looking into his steady gray eyes. "Maybe we're both seeing a mirage. We'll find out."

She was pressing her warm, parted lips hard upon his mouth then in a kiss the like of which Sudden Cassidy had never before experienced. A kiss that made him feel as if a desert sandstorm had started in his brain. He knew he shouldn't have done it, but his mouth slipped from her lips to her throat.

Perhaps it was the reaction of discovering she had not killed a man by mistake, with the emotion stirring knowledge that a dead girl lay close to them against the violently yellow rocks. The girl's hands pressed Sudden's head more tightly to her. Just for an instant that was, then she moved quickly, freeing herself.

"God in heaven!" she cried out. "What is wrong with me? Who are you? That poor girl over there? Why did they kill her? We must be plumb loco, cowboy! I never—"

IT SNAPPED Sudden to his sober senses, and he knew this girl had done the right thing just in time. But he was also convinced that this was but the beginning and not the end. And something sang inside him, a new feeling that had not been there when he had believed he had to keep a tight loop around his heart in the rescue he had planned for the dead Mary Harden.

Sudden was smart enough to know that Mary had been of another world outside his own, and that having been an owlhoot tool of Rust Kinnard, he could never be fit for such as her. But this girl was of a different world, his own. He got to his feet.

She had pulled the wool shirt closer to her throat now. She was

wearing the overalls and the boots of a desert range girl. Her face was deeply bronzed by the burning sun. Her hands were brown and had a pliant strength that Sudden knew could dally a rope or cook an appetizing mess of chuck.

He told her the truth. "I'm Sudden Cassidy," he said. "I have been one of the gang who killed this girl, Mary Harden. They murdered her brother. The chief took a liking to her. We turned off Ghost Creek and starved their cattle. The chief was driving her out, so he could git Rancho Estaban all baited again fer a chuckle-headed fool with more money than hoss sense. She's comin' from the East t' take her turn with the Ghost Creek swindle. An', bigod, the only way I can git the stink o' dead cows out'n my head is t' stop this dumb gal at Crook Elbow. Then, so help me, I'm comin' back gunnin' fer Rust Kinnard t' ease my own mind over the killin' o' Mary Harden."

The girl's eyes were liquidly soft. She was standing erect, searching his face, studying his lean jaw and throat, glancing at his hard, clenching hands.

She nodded and a little smile flicked across her red lips.

"I'm Jane Doran," she said. "My dad's prospectin' in Boot canyon, an' I missed the trail this morning. I'm teetotally lost, an' I'll have to count on you to show me the sign back to Boot canyon. I ain't knowin' all o' what you've been, but I savvy a heap of what you mean. When you get back from Crook Elbow, I'll be with my dad an' there'll be a mess o' real powder biscuits for you, Sudden Cassidy. But I'd advise you to go easy on explainin' to this dumb gal at Crook Elbow."

A darting shadow crossed the baking white alkali sand between them. There was another and another. The buzzards were flying, waiting, stretching their repulsively naked necks. Their half-lidded eyes were fixed upon the dead girl in the rocks.

Seeing that they had but the two horses, Sudden did all that could be done. Jane Doran stood beside her paint pony, and her face was wet with tears when Sudden had piled the brown and yellow rocks high to protect what had to be the grave of Mary.

SUDDEN could only judge that Kinnard or one of his killers, had sighted Mary Harden high on the rocks and killed her at long range. There was no sign that Jane Doran or he had been sighted in the arroya below, or that his own guns or Jane's rifle had been heard. He guessed that the murderer had been riding when he saw Mary Harden, and when she had fallen, he had ridden rapidly away.

Boot canyon lay but three miles from the gap through which Ghost Creek flowed normally to water the spread of the Rancho Estaban. As they rode back to a trail which would carry Jane Doran out of the malpais, Sudden had a growing conviction that when he rolled his tarp for other parts, he would not ride alone.

For Jane Doran rode close, and their knees touched. The tapering contours of thigh and slender waist, of rounded bosom and softly blue-veined throat were invitation

(Continued on page 84)

Missouri McDonald was sure that the lovely senorita had mistaken him for somebody else, but who was he to deny her? Especially when he learned she was about to be married to his worst enemy?

It was at that moment that Missouri chose to come out of hiding.

EIGHT hundred miles of wilderness lay behind the rolling wagon wheels as the caravan topped the last rise of the Glorieta range. Eight hundred miles of hell's own hardships—over mountains, deserts, swollen streams, and the limitless plains spread under a burning sky—were ended at last.

The wilderness had been all the worse because it was womanless. And now Santa Fe sprawled beneath them, at the foot of the

SIREN of SANTA FE

By JACKSON W. THORNE

Sangre de Cristo mountains, on the edge of a rolling plateau.

Young "Missouri" McDonald lifted his six feet of rawboned strength in his stirrups and gazed on the pueblo with shining gray eyes.

There were women there. Dark-eyed, jet-haired senoritas, provocative and desirable. Women aflame with all the fire of Spain; women who wore their skirts short and their blouses low at the neck, and laughed at the bustles that were

the fashion back in St. Louis. . . .

A wild whoop burst from Missouri's wide lips. He hit spurs to the jaded horse that had carried him three hundred miles, from the middle spring of the Cimarron. The older, bearded traders of the caravan laughed as he galloped past them.

They had been forty days on the Santa Fe trail. Missouri, because of things that had happened on the Cimarron, had been twenty days more.

He yanked a pistol from his holster, fired into the air. He jerked his battered hat from his shock of tawny hair, and waved it aloft.

He could see people in the streets, now. A shout came up to him:

"Los Americanos! Los carros! La entrada de la caravana!"

THE first shadows of sunset were stealing into the plaza; a bell, deep-toned, sounded in the cathedral tower. To the lad from Missouri, this was like another world.

The traders caught something of his enthusiasm. Mules and horses swung down the last mile in a harness-slapping gallop. Soldiers in makeshift uniforms streamed from the barracks and across the *plaza de armas;* the customs authorities in gay Spanish costumes emerged from buildings to inspect the goods of the *Americanos,* and blanket shrouded Indians watched with beady-eyed impassiveness.

Missouri McDonald saw none of these as he drew rein in front of La Fonda, the inn where the wagons were halting. Missouri was looking at a pair of flashing eyes.

The girl was strolling on the sunlit side of the plaza, accompanied by an older, heavier woman who wore a long black shawl. She wore a crimson scarf around her neck and pulled carelessly over her chin, but her full lips made mockery of its color. There was a jeweled comb in her hair, a lace *mantilla* falling over the supple curve of her shoulders.

Missouri's hungry eyes strayed on down the girl's figure. Yes, she wore her dress short, just as the traders had told him the New Mexican women did. He had never seen such a short dress on any woman except the brazen girls to be found in Carondolet, the Creole quarter of St. Louis. Her legs justified their display, and she walked with a free sway of her hips that made a bustle sacrilege.

Missouri's breath escaped him in a long, drawn-out whistle. He shook his head in admiration—and then gasped.

The girl had smiled at him. And now, ignoring the sharp word of protest from the black-shawled *duenna* who walked just behind her, she tossed a rose to the tawny-haired American.

Missouri came down from his saddle, heart hammering against his ribs. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "Gosh! She—"

"That's the man, lieutenant! That's the man who stole my horse!"

Missouri whirled. He knew that voice!

IT was Wolf Galloway. Shaven, now, except for a black, waxed mustache. Sneering as he stood on the sidewalk, resplendent in a braided jacket, a yellow sash and

laced trousers that flared over gaudy boots.

Galloway was pointing to Missouri McDonald. The last time Missouri had seen the man was back on the Cimarron. He was bearded, then, and dirty with the dust of the trail—

A growl tore from the lips of the tawny-haired younger man. He slapped his hand to the pistol at his belt, but four soldiers leaped upon him and bore him to the ground. Dimly, he heard a scream and knew it came from the lovely senorita.

"Let me up!" Missouri howled. "Let me git at that skunk! So I stole his hoss, did I? Ask him what *he* stole—my wagon and team! Five thousand dollars in gold! He took everything I had and left me this miserable hunk o' crowbait he calls a hoss!"

The sneer twisted Wolf Galloway's thin, dark face. "You'll find my brand on the animal, lieutenant!" he said, and twisted the pointed mustache with a nervous hand. "The fellow is a liar—all that he says I did, he did to me!"

"Come along, senor!" the officer said courteously. "You will be tried soon—perhaps *manana,* if Senor Galloway can appear to press his charges."

There was no use struggling. Bayonets menaced Missouri's back now. He gave Galloway a blazing glance, and moved forward. The swarthy man had beaten him to the punch. It was principally in the hope of finding Galloway and revenge that Missouri McDonald had come on to Santa Fe.

The traders were busy with the customs inspection, watching hawk-like as duty after duty was imposed on their goods by the inspectors. They had no time for Missouri or his troubles. He was marched down one side of the plaza, and then the guard turned across the drill ground—

"*Senor!*"

She came flying out of the shadows, the crimson scarf fluttering like a flame at her lovely throat. The soldiers, always slaves of beauty, parted respectfully, and the startled lieutenant came to salute.

Missouri caught his breath, lost it even more quickly. For the girl was in his arms, clinging to him in a mad embrace, her warm, resilient figure pressed so closely against his hard, lean frame that he could feel the quick rise and fall of her firm young bosom.

She kissed him ardently—a dozen times. On his cheeks, on his mouth. Missouri McDonald forgot Galloway, forgot the soldiers, forgot this strange town at the end of the trail.

It was enough to be alive and young. To be holding this lovely girl in his arms, and to know the quick, mad tempo of love after sixty days of hardships and loneliness.

His head swam in a blurred ecstasy. She must have mistaken him for somebody else—she didn't look like the kind of girl who'd throw herself at a stranger. Soon she might discover her mistake—

MISSOURI seized Time by the forelock, drew her even closer, savoring every breath-taking curve. Repeatedly he kissed the girl's lips as he had never kissed a woman in all his life.

Their mouths were still clinging, when the lieutenant coughed softly behind his hand. "Your pardon, Senorita Armijo," he said. "The prisoner—"

"You must let heem go! At once, do you understand? You must let heem go!"

Senorita Armijo—the name was the music of castanents and tinkling guitars to Missouri's ears—stamped an adorably small foot. Her duenna had all but been prostrated by this public display; she was in the shadows, calling upon all the saints, saying again and again: "Josefa! Josefa! *Ai, Madre de Dios!*"

"I am desolate, senorita!" mourned the lieutenant. "But I must take the prisoner to the *calabozo.* Perhaps if you would see someone in authority—the governor, maybe—"

"No, no!" Josefa shrieked and flung her arms around Missouri again. Her *mantilla* caught the wind, tickled the tall man's cheek. Josefa's lips brushed cloyingly sweet across his ear.

"Have no fear, senor!" she whispered. "I weel visit you in your cell. If you weel help me, I weel help you to escape!"

Missouri McDonald nodded quickly, and kissed her to bind the bargain. He could imagine nothing more delightful than helping this delectable creature.

She left his arms, as if reluctant to say goodbye. Her oval face was pale ivory against the shadows that deepened in the plaza, her eyes were dark mysteries. But there was a light in them, and Missouri knew that his kiss had kindled a flame.

"*Adelante!*" said the lieutenant.

They went on, skirting the *plaza de armas,* turning into a doorway. At a table where a grunting, pock-marked man sat, the lieutenant spoke rapidly in Spanish. Missouri heard Wolf Galloway's name mentioned several times, and each time it was spoken the pock-marked man grunted respectfully. Then he rose and jingled a bunch of keys.

"This way, senor!"

The cell was narrow and crawling with vermin. It smelled like all the prisoners who had ever been incarcerated there. Missouri remembered things he had read about the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition. He gripped the bars and stared into the corridor as the footsteps died away. Santa Fe was under Spanish rule—

IT seemed an eternity before she came. In reality, it was but an hour. The wrinkled, lip-clucking *duenna* was still imploring the saints to take a hand when a soldier led the way down the corridor to unlock the door and let the two women enter Missouri's cell.

He clicked the lock shut and departed, then. The girl caught the shoulders of Missouri's buckskin jacket and looked up at him.

"Senor!" she cried. "You must help me!"

The tall man folded her in his arms. She protested and tried to push herself away—

"No, no, senor! You do not understand. That—that in the plaza was what you call a play. For the lieutenant."

"Yeah?" panted Missouri. "Well, this is a play—for *you,*

The suddenness of her move took his breath away.

Josefa! I love you. I'm crazy about you!"

The girl sighed. With a wordless little cry, she abandoned resistance. Her arms flew around the tall American's neck, and her panting lips found his. Missouri could feel every responsive curve of her lovely y o u n g body straining against him in the caress.

"*Josefa!*" scolded the duenna, and brought them back to earth. The girl broke away.

"It is no longer a play!" she said slowly, her lips tremulous. "But you must help me, *caro mio.* I do not even know your name!"

"Missouri. Missouri McDonald!"

"Missouri—that is a funny name! You are no friend of Senor Galloway?"

"Hardly!" growled the tall man. "He robbed me. Now he has me throwed in jail."

"Good, Missouri!" The name sounded strange, with her delightful accent. "Then you weel help me. *Manana*—tomorrow—I am to marry this Senor Galloway!"

"Marry him? Good Lord, Josefa—you can't do that! I just found you. You're goin' to marry *me.* You don't love Galloway, do you?"

There was candle light flickering in the corridor. It showed her long, downcast lashes, the slow, bitter shake of her head.

"No, I do not love heem. But in Santa Fe, Missouri, it is not for the woman to say. Marriages are —what you call it? Feexed. Marriages are feexed by the girl's father. Unless you weel take me away with you, I must marry heem!"

"Tomorrow!" echoed Missouri, hopelessly. "And me in jail!"

Josefa pressed her slenderness against the bars. The sentry was at the other end of the corridor, rolling a cigarette of powdered tobacco and a corn shuck.

"Queeck!" she whispered, whirling on the *duenna.* "Take off your clothes—give them to Missouri!"

"Josefa! *Madre de Dios*—"

"Hurry, Maria! Do as I say. Missouri, you put on Maria's clothes!"

It was a chance. The tall man was already shucking his buckskin jacket. He turned to a dark corner of the cell and removed his worn homespun trousers. Josefa was keeping vigil at the corridor, lest the guard come their way. Maria panted and groaned, but shed voluminous petticoats and the long, black shawl. Out of the corner of his eye, Missouri saw her fat, shapeless figure, and wondered if she could have ever been like Josefa Armijo—

A few minutes later, Josefa called the guard and he came with a clanking of keys. The Spanish girl went into the darkened corner and embraced Maria.

"*Adios, caro mio!*" she cried, then stepped out into the corridor. Missouri, stooped so the shawl that hid most of his face would also drape his long, angular frame, followed with a halting step.

The girl buried her face in a tiny lace handkerchief and sobbed. In this manner, they walked through the anteroom where the pock-marked man sat at his desk, and out into the soft summer night.

AROUND a corner of the plaza, they quickened their steps. "This way!" said Josefa, and turned into an alleyway. A little farther, they crossed an *acequia* that brought water to the town, and halted for a moment under the shadow of rustling cottonwood trees.

"There is my home," said Josefa, pointing. "We must be careful. Father is not there now, but the other servants must not see. It would be better if you climb the balcony to my window. I will light candles to guide you. Wait here."

Missouri kissed her, watched her hurry to the door, and told himself he could scale a thousand-foot peak to her window. Somewhere in the town, a violin scraped and a guitar dripped gay melody. There was a round, yellow moon lifting above the mountains. And then squares of candlelight made soft, leaf-traced patterns on the flagged walk.

He drew a deep breath, left the shadow of the tree and caught the stout vines that clung to the stone wall. It came to him that Santa Fe was old—older than St. Louis, even—with an aristocracy of its own. And without a doubt, Josefa Armijo was of that exiled bit of blue-blooded Spain—

She was waiting for him with a kiss, in a room soft with candlelight and perfume. A room hung with tapestries and paintings, furnished in mellow Old World taste, with none of the severity of America's frontier states. And she was willing to leave all this to go with him.

Missouri found her lips, pressed his own hungrily to them. His hands slipped down around her waist. She had changed into some soft, silken thing that made the satin warmth of her ivory skin seem very near.

"Don't—don't, Missouri!" she panted. "I must get the things I weel wish to take weeth us!"

She pulled away. Missouri watched the sinuous grace of her figure as she walked across the room. There was no pose in the carriage of the girl, no affectation in that free, alluring sway of curved charm. It was the natural gait of an aristocrat—the proud stride of a thoroughbred. She began folding things on a couch.

Missouri watched as long as he could. Then he was at her side, sitting on the couch, pulling her down on his lap, his lips devouring her mouth—

After awhile she jerked away from him. "Missouri!" she scolded, but with a smile. "We have much to do! Where weel you take me?"

He hadn't thought of that. Why, he had only arrived in Santa Fe. And Santa Fe was the beginning of Adventure, not the end of the trail for him. Besides, there was Wolf Galloway to settle with—Wolf, with five thousand dollars of Missouri's hard-earned money!

But there was Josefa Armijo, with her dancing dark eyes and the raven hair clinging closely against the white column of her lovely throat; with her curved, bare shoulder and the soft loveliness of her bosom—

"I don't know, yet, darling," said Missouri McDonald. "We'll figure that out. Got to git some hosses, I reckon."

"My father has horses," the girl said, and watched him cross the room. He was rangy and tall—taller by a foot than most of the men she had known. He was looking out of the window, where the moonlight lay over flat roofs of the pueblo, listening to the faint strains of music from some *cantina,* thinking hard.

"How come your father wanted you to marry Galloway?"

"I do not know, Missouri. Except that Senor Galloway is very reech, and father has not much money any more."

"Yeah," said Missouri, remembering five thousand dollars in gold. "Yeah, he's rich."

Then he leaned from the window, staring at the sidewalk.

A WOMAN was passing. Even from above, even in the dim silver of moonlight, Missouri could see that she was beautiful. Not in Josefa's aristocratic, delicate fashion, but in a more deliberately invitational manner. She walked with an alluring roll of her hips that was studied; her bosom danced under the silken sheen of a clinging, low-cut gown with every stride. From above, Missouri could see the moonlight glistening on the white throat, the shadowed slope below—

He was a man, and he saw all this. But it was the scarf the woman wore on her jet-black hair that sent him whirling from the window.

It was a plaid scarf. Scottish plaid—the colors of the clan McDonald. It had been among the possessions of Missouri's wagon, when Wolf Galloway slugged him on the Cimarron, and left him to die.

"Honey," said Missouri, "you go ahead and git ready. I'll be back. But I've got to go downstairs for a few minutes. If you can have a servant saddle two horses—"

"Be careful, Missouri! The soldiers—"

He laughed. "In this outfit, they'll never know me. I look like an old woman."

"Hurry back, darling," she whispered. "I am afraid for you!"

Missouri kissed her, and went down the vines, fighting the petticoats that hampered his long legs. That was another thing. He had to get some man's clothes. . . .

MISSOURI'S boots clicked on the flagging behind the woman with the scarf.

She turned flirtatious eyes at the sound of a strong man's stride, saw the shawled, dress-clad figure, and stared.

"Good evenin', senorita!" said Missouri.

The girl threw back her head and gave vent to a burst of silvery laughter. "A woman!" she said. "*Por Dios*—a woman!"

Missouri had known enough of her brazen kind to classify her as a *cantina* girl. She angered him with that laugh. He stepped suddenly to her side, caught her and kept her head back while he kissed her thoroughly, satisfyingly.

She stopped laughing. A deep, sighing breath lifted swelling curves against him. She was more rounded, softer, more mature than Josefa—

"*A todos santos!*" she breathed,

All the way down the vines, he fought the petticoats.

and looked at him wide-eyed. "A woman who kisses like a man!"

"Cut it out!" growled Missouri. He wanted to ask her where she had obtained that scarf; wanted to know if she knew Wolf Galloway. But not yet. "I've got to git some clothes," he said. "Know where I can find some?"

The girl slipped a soft arm around his waist. "Come with me, my *Americano!*" she said, looking up at him possessively. "I weel show you. I am Dona Salcedes."

"Right glad to know you, Dona," grinned Missouri. There was warm promise in her velvety eyes.

They walked. "You do not know who I am when I say I am Dona Salcedes!" she said petulantly.

"I just got in Santa Fe tonight. Who are you?"

She gave an imperious toss of her dark head. The Scottish shawl fluttered.

"Dona Salcedes is the belle of Santa Fe! The best monte dealer in all of New Spain. You 'ave not heard of me?"

"Oh—oh, sure!" Missouri lied. So that was it—monte. He had an idea Wolf Galloway might have lost other things to her besides the shawl—

"Come up here weeth me, senor!" murmured Dona. "I like you, no? You like Dona?"

She lifted a latch, and stood in the shadowed doorway for her answer. The music Missouri had heard was coming from the *cantina* next door; it was challenging, insinuating, it did things to him. He breathed the subtle perfume of Dona's hair. Her lips were rouged. Parted now as she breathed quickly, they revealed and accentuated the whiteness of her perfect teeth.

Missouri caught her fiercely to him. The womanless wilderness had been long—

"Like you?" he said huskily. "Any man who didn't would be no man at all!"

She broke away from him with that silvery laughter, and her slippers twinkled up the steps, into candlelight that brought her form into silhouette.

"Come on, senor. I have some men's clothes for you if you treat Dona nice!"

Missouri lifted the petticoats and went up the steps.

THE candle-lighted room was more showy, more on the gaudy side when compared to Josefa's, but no less rich. It smelled of incense and cigarette smoke; everywhere was cushioned luxury. Through the floor the music beat in pulsing waves that stirred Missouri's blood.

"*Vino, Juanita! Andale!*" Dona called, clapping her hands.

A wrinkled old woman brought the wine. It was new and heady, and Missouri had not eaten since noon. After the third glass, the room whirled a little.

Dona opened a chest and brought out gay *caballero's* clothing—a braided *chaqueta,* laced *calzoneras,* a *serape.* Missouri shook his head. He saw a buckskin jacket hanging in the closet. Dona had known many men who traveled the trail—

They had another glass of wine. Dona's laugh was like a glass chandelier falling, shattering away off somewhere. But her head was in Missouri's lap. He kissed her.

"Got to go," he said thickly, remembering. "Got to git into them clothes and go. I ain't got any money, Dona. I was robbed, and—"

"I do not want your money, senor!"

She drew him down against her. The room whirled faster. The perfume at the lobes of her earringed, shell-pink ears, on her ivory, pulsing throat—it was intoxicating, like the wine. It went to a man's head.

But after a time Missouri remembered again. Sooner or later, Maria would be discovered in the jail. And Josefa would be waiting —her father might return and find the horses.

Missouri lurched to his feet. He didn't hear the step on the stairs, but Dona's face suddenly went tense. She sprang to his side, grabbed his arm.

"You must hide, senor! Someone is coming here!"

"Let 'em come!" said the tall man. He slipped into the buckskin shirt. He took a pair of the laced trousers, eyed them with a little disgust, and sighed. They were better than petticoats.

Dona propelled him into another room. He leaned unsteadily against the wall and managed with some effort to get into the tight-fitting, flaring-legged trousers. Then, suddenly he jerked erect, cold sober. The words he heard through the door were all-revealing.

"You have given me nothing, Dona! And you have my money—everything I own, except the clothes I am wearing!"

Dona's laugh was cold, scintillating, now. "And what do you want, senor? The money, no?"

MISSOURI stooped to the keyhole. It was as he thought. That was Wolf Galloway's voice, husky with fury; that was Galloway's ornately jacketed shoulders moving away from him, while Dona backed against the chest and spread her arms out to guard it.

"No!" said Galloway. "You don't need to stand in front of your money box, Dona. I'll have plenty of money after tomorrow. But you're not going to make a fool of me."

He caught her in a sudden leap. Dona scuffled silently; the room was full of panting and scraping boots, there was a ripping sound and Dona's blouse fluttered to the floor.

Galloway's boots trampled the silk. The girl cried out and tried to cover herself with her arms, but Galloway jerked them to her sides. The candlelight glistened on satin-sleek, ivory tinted skin.

Missouri opened the door, slammed it behind him with a purposely loud crash. Galloway whirled, an oath leaping to his thin lips.

"McDonald!" he said, and tugged at a pistol thrust in his yellow sash.

"Yeah!" drawled the Missourian. He sprang, cat-like for one of such rawboned build, and his right fist balled and swung. The sting of skinned knuckles against Wolf Galloway's jaw was a joy, surging fiercely through him.

The pistol crashed on the floor. Galloway went over a chair, shat-

(Continued on page 122)

All they wrangled around the Boxed T any more was a passel of dudes; but here was a real cowman wanting a job, and he wasn't to be turned down. As it happened, with a rich and famous girl coming to the ranch, he was a good man to have around

RIGHT from the start I reckon I sort of cottoned to George. I liked the easy way he sat his saddle, and the way he grinned when he handed down the mail the postmaster sent out from town, the way he asked, respectful like, how was chances for a job. He didn't call me dad nor grampa; he just said his name was George Jones from down Yuma way and could we use a wrangler.

"Wrangler," I snorted. "Mister, all we wrangle around the Boxed T any more is a passel of derned dudes!" Then I got me a better look, and just warmed up all over! His chaps was real old time batwings, not these fancy new Angoras Jim Tedford, the Bossman makes us wear, and his pants was faded levis, and his shirt faded white from too much washing! He had cowman written all over him, so I told him I'd see what the Bossman said, left him shaking down a feed for his horse, and limped up toward the house.

Time was, before beef dropped out of sight, when we ran a passel of critters on the Boxed T. When the old Major was alive sometimes we shipped as many as ten, twelve thousand head. But since the Bossman took over, we got rid of the

That George was like a cold blooded killer when he got hold of Dancy.

The WOMAN NOBODY KNOWS

By ROY CUTLER

cows and started wrangling dudes. You've probably read of us—Boxed T, fifty bucks a week, including a guide?

Since we're a class outfit we got a new ranch house. Instead of the old, comfortable sprawling building the Major added to, year by year, we got a white washed Spanish type layout, with wrought iron gates, and balconies for the ladies to listen from when the *Mexicano* boys—paid by us—come around on moonlit nights with their git-tars. Right then, being early in the season we only had a couple of guests, and both of them was nuts, though danged if I'm ever surprised at what a blaze-faced dude will do, no more than a locoed horse.

F'instance there was the Professor, a little dried up fellow with a belly like a foundered brone, wearing goggles, always with a book in one hand and a little hammer in the other. He trotted all around the country knocking off chunks of colored rocks and dropping them into the bag he wore around his neck. And there was McAdams, the business man from Chicago. I never knew what business he was in. Gosh, he was big enough to eat hay and pull a wagon! And him out here recovering from a nervous breakdown at the time.

Anyway, that night, I run into the Professor straining his eyes in the darkness looking at a pebble he'd picked up in the *patio*. I gave him his mail and he just stared at it, like he was wondering what the heck it was. McAdams was next, sitting beneath a *retama* smoking. He was a chain smoker. He grabbed the letter I gave him, flipped on a pocket lighter and peered at that letter with the whitest face I ever saw.

Them dudes!

Before I got clear in to the Bossman I saw something else, too. I saw Lisbeth Tedford, the Bossman's daughter over in a dark corner, and she wasn't alone. Dancy Spencer was with her, and me, I had no use for Dancy, even if he was a trick rider and shooter, all decked out in movie star clothes and with a movie star's face! What Lisbeth could see in him since she got back from school is more than I knew.

Shoo! I taught that girl to ride, and to rope, taught her to be a good judge of cowflesh and horseflesh, but I reckon that knowledge don't mean a blamed thing when it comes to sizin' up manflesh. She'd been going for fancy dressed Dancy, lock stock and barrel, hook line and sinker, for the last two months.

SO I saw them there in that dark *patio* and I don't care if I am only a hand. I walked over quiet like and I said, "Excuse me, Dancy, have you got a match?" Mister, he let loose of Lisbeth and unwrapped hisself plenty fast. Little Lisbeth jumped up to her feet and started to fix her hair and smooth her dress like a girl does, and tried to look calm and at ease.

Dancy growled, "You old buzzard, get to hell away from here! What you want with a match, you ain't had a cigarette of your own for twenty years!"

Lordy, he smelled like the Queen City Hotel, top floor front! All slicked down! Him calling *me* tight. I said, "Rosita down in town gave me a note to give you. I want

a match to see if I can find it!" He didn't answer that one! So I went on into the house and handed the Bossman the rest of the mail. While he thumbed through it, I told him about George, how we better put on some handsome new hands before the season opened. I was busy and he was busy and neither one of us heard Lisbeth and Dancy come in. But at the sound of her voice I turned, right smart.

All I got was a glare from a pair of black eyes. Yep, Lisbeth favored her mom. She was small, but lithe, like an Arab runner, and her hair was as black as her eyes, and her lips as red as them poppies down in the south pasture. It was right then I realized she wasn't a kid any more, and danged if I blamed Dancy. She was as fine a looking little critter, I realized, as I'd ever seen. Little fresh budding bosom, and hips just starting to sway out.

Anyway she said, "Daddy, Dancy has something he wants to say to you."

Me, I held my breath. Heck, I've seen a few shows and read a few of them flaming novels where the hero asks papa for daughter's hand.

But the Bossman jumped up so derned fast he overturned his chair. "Look!" he hollered, waving a letter. "Look, Liz! The Boxed T is made! My God, read it!"

Lisbeth hasn't liked for us to call her Liz since she came home from school. She took the letter frowning, but when she read it she got as excited as her paw. She began to dance around.

"Oooooh," she squealed, "the most exclusive girl in America!" And she read it outloud. It was addressed to her paw and it said, "Please make reservations for Miss Candace Prevost and her companion-secretary, Miss Mary Smith, beginning the 25th of the present month. Miss Prevost's visit is made for the purpose of absolute rest, peace and quiet. She is traveling incognito. Should you notify the papers, or should it leak out that she is at the Boxed T, the visit is definitely disapproved. One or two other guests will not matter as long as they do not know her identity. You may call her Miss Brown while she is present. Respectfully." And it was signed by *her* paw, per some sixty-ninth secretary.

Even me, Old Limpy, had heard of the Prevost kid. The richest girl in America they call her, and the girl nobody knows. Old man Prevost had always been so derned scared of kidnapers that no photographer ever had a good picture of her after she grew up. When they did get one she was always wearing dark glasses and had a hand up over her face or something. Always traveled with a bodyguard, too.

WELL, we talked and talked, all excited like and I was on my way out when Lisbeth poked Dancy and whispered in his ear. I couldn't help hearing his answer but I might as well have been reading his mind. He whispered, "We better wait a couple of days, honey, till he gets his mind off this!" That boy was saying to hisself: Dance, old boy, step easy about marrying Lisbeth—you're going to

have a shot at the richest girl in the world in a few days!

I passed the Professor mumbling to hisself with his letters still lying unopened beside him, went on out the iron gate toward the bunkhouse where us boys stay. Somebody said, "Limpy," sort of thin and desperate-like, and McAdams, the big business man, loomed up beside me. The moon had popped out like a polished silver saddle horn and it was a pretty sight. McAdams was breathing hard, and I could see a lot of eye white, like a steer making up its mind whether or not to booger. "Limpy," he said, and sort of laughed, "do you boys carry them sixshotters for atmosphere or will they shoot?"

"They shoot, mister," I told him, "and we keep 'em loaded."

"Can I see yours?" he asked, and like a dummy I handed it to him. He no sooner took it from me than I realized my mistake because he laughed like a hyena. I reached for the gun, started to jump after him. Danged if he didn't cover me with it.

"No you don't, Limpy," he giggled. "You nor anyone else is going to stop me! I should have done this long ago! Don't take a step, Limpy, or I'll shoot. It wouldn't make no difference to me. Nothing does."

And he started backing away in the moonlight. I could see little drops of saliva trickling down his chin and he was plenty boogered by now. And I knew he'd shoot me, too, if I moved, just as sure as he aimed to shoot hisself!

Then right behind him I saw a shadow sliding along. It was George Jones, the new hand! But behind McAdams he kicked a pebble and McAdams, nervous as a cat, whirled. The gun went *boom,* but George was already diving under it. Like I said, McAdams was big, bigger than George, and they rolled over and over on the ground. I was so anxious watching George twist that gun away from him that I didn't hear the rest of them come running up. The gun sailed off to one side. Both men got to their feet. McAdams screamed and ducked and flew into George. One-two-one-two! McAdams went down on his face and laid there, out like a light.

George straightened up, blew on his knuckles and looked right at Lisbeth. She said, "You brute! You utter brute! Striking a guest!" She dropped down on her knees beside McAdams, never caring that her short skirt hiked up to show her pretty knees and a little skin gleaming in the moonlight.

Dancy swaggers over to George with his chest out and said, "I got a mind to—to—"

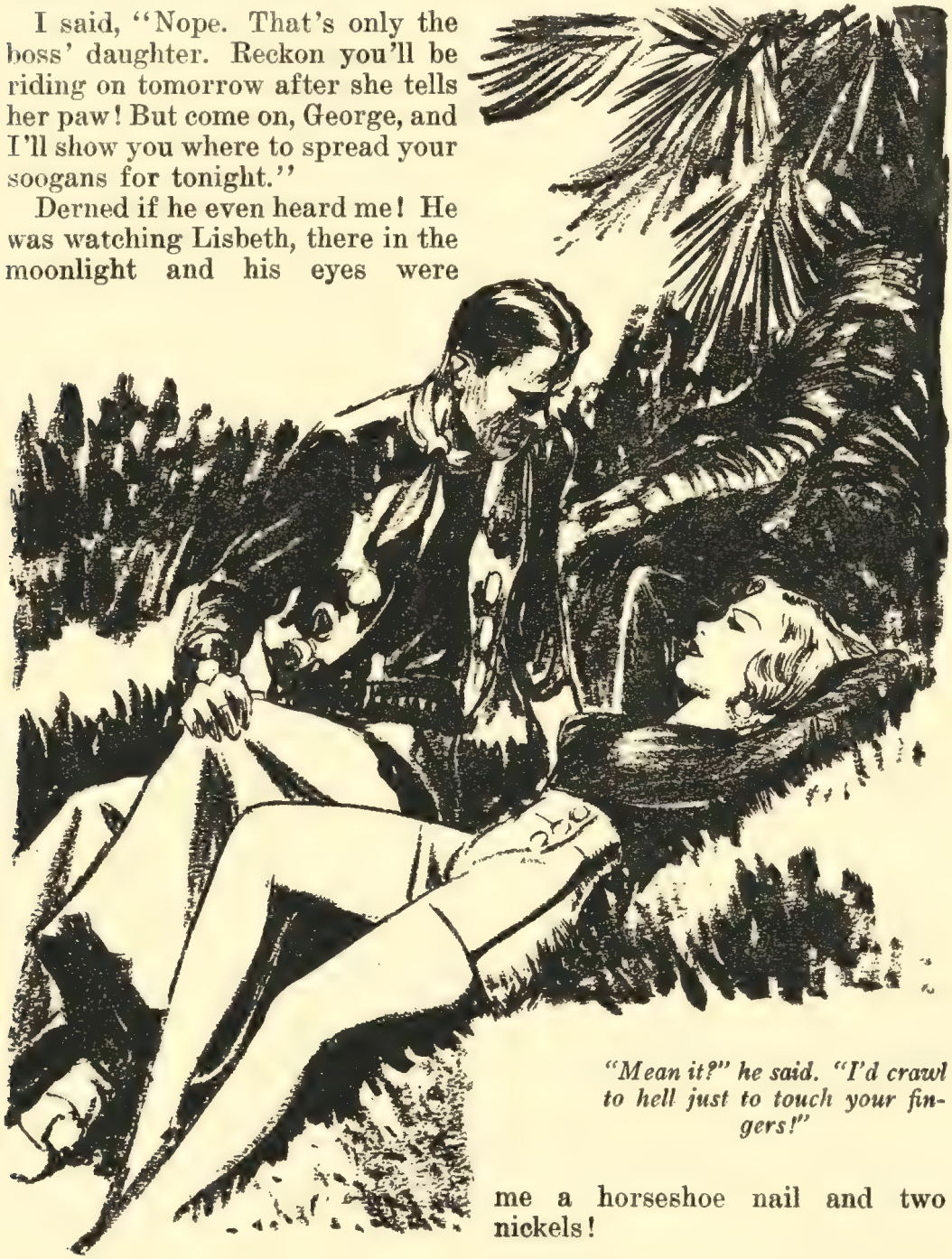
George just looked him in the eyes and said, "You got a mind to what?"

So Dancy lost whatever he had a mind to do and helped Lisbeth get Mister McAdams on his feet and up toward the house. Me, I squatted down and picked up the letters and papers McAdams had dropped, aiming to give them back to him. And I was thinking: Dang it! Now Lisbeth will tell her paw and George won't get no job.

George said, his voice sort of awed like a pilgrim seeing the *mesa* for the first time, "Who was that? An angel?"

I said, "Nope. That's only the boss' daughter. Reckon you'll be riding on tomorrow after she tells her paw! But come on, George, and I'll show you where to spread your soogans for tonight."

Derned if he even heard me! He was watching Lisbeth, there in the moonlight and his eyes were dreamy and far away. I had to take him by the arm gentle like and lead him away. When I asked him does he have a store bought cigarette he reached in his pocket and handed me a horseshoe nail and two nickels!



"Mean it?" he said. "I'd crawl to hell just to touch your fingers!"

THERE wasn't no trouble about McAdams. Next morning before breakfast he came out and apologized sort of stiff, even shook hands with George. Lisbeth didn't tell her paw. The only thing come

of it was bad blood between George and Dancy. Nothing said, then, but a storm wise ranny could sense it in the air. Then here's what happened.

After breakfast we were chiseling along on a second cup of coffee when somebody banged the screen door of the bunkhouse and said, "Good morning. Will one of you boys catch me up a horse?"

Yeah, Lisbeth, getting ready to ride down for her morning swim! Lisbeth was wearing what she laughingly calls her swimming suit. It's white—what there is of it. It didn't leave anything at all to imagination, that suit, and the little cape around her neck was wide open, and below the cape her figure was as firm and her legs were as trim and provoking as young birches in a breeze! George turns over his chair, blushing and got up. She smiled at him and all bets was off. He was a gone gosling, like a maverick in quicksand!

But it was Dancy that said, "Sure, sweetheart, I'll rope you out a horse." He glared at George and swaggered out.

Time he came back George stretched casual like and said, "Reckon I'll ride out and look things over if I'm going to work here."

Dancy glared after him and I could see he was thinking the same thing as me. So he ups and broke out a pony. By then George had disappeared. I saddled up horses for McAdams and the Professor, left them groundhitched outside the ranchhouse and rode off cross country toward the swimming hole. Not that I was going to spy on anybody, y'unnerstand! I simply aimed to prevent trouble.

Sure enough, when I got there things was happening. Only George and Lisbeth was in sight. She was a sure enough grown woman! I had a girl once back in Cheyenne that acted the same way, but that's neither here nor there. Lisbeth was strutting her stuff for the edification of George, the new hand. There he was on the bank, pop-eyed. She'd been in the creek and that skimpy white suit was really clinging in spots where it shouldn't have been clinging. She'd preen herself like a peacock, just as pretty as anything you ever saw. Poor George, he kept getting redder and redder. Then the payoff came.

She fixed it so as the neckstrap of her suit came untied. I could have spanked her! Hell, any man's got blood in him, ain't he? She backed up to him, holding the untied ends behind her and there was her back as smooth and satiny as a pair of new boots, and her so close and the drops of water gleaming on her like gold. She knew what to expect and she got it. He sort of groaned and whirled her around and kissed her. I'm not saying she helped, and I'm not saying she fought him. Anyway he kissed her complete, her slim figure crushed against him right pleasant like to see, and that George kissed her plenty long!

I WAS so pleased-like inside I didn't see Dancy myself. Dancy tiptoed out of the bushes and whammed him with the business end of a quirt. George hit on his face and rolled over and sat up,

dazed. Dancy hollered, "What do you mean kissing the girl I'm going to marry?" And he ups and tried to kick George, which same was a serious mistake. George caught his foot and pulled him down.

Lisbeth stepped aside as pleased as punch, the little huzzy. Both men were on their feet by this time. I will say this for Dancy. He showed more nerve than I thought he had. He must have gotten mighty tired getting up. That George was like a cold blooded killer. He never tried to knock him out at first, he just wanted to hurt him—and he sure did it. Finally, the last time, he reached down and picked Dancy up and put him to sleep. Then he turned and glared at Lisbeth.

"You knew that was going to happen, didn't you? You knew he was in the bushes watching!"

He was right, too. See, Dancy failed her the night before, he didn't ask Jim Tedford for her hand in marriage. This was her way of getting even! She knew George would follow her and she knew Dancy would, too. But she didn't like the sneer in George's voice. And she didn't like it at all when George picked Dancy up by the seat of the britches and the nape of the neck and heaved him in the swimming hole. Fact is, she walked up to him bristling and just like in a book she said, "You beast!" And she ups and whammed him across the jaw.

George, he stood there looking at her for a minute. Then he reached out and grabbed her and took up right where he had left off. I stepped quietly out and tossed Dancy a rope and pulled him out of the drink and got him in his saddle and started for home. Looking back they was still standing there, George still kissing her. She was sort of limp like in his arms. I'm not sure but I think she had an arm about his neck. Anyway she wasn't fighting him none.

TWO days later the richest gal in the world, the girl nobody knew, showed up at the Boxed T. I'm not going to say I wasn't excited as everybody else. Even the Professor and McAdams—yeah, he stayed on—sensed something in the air. That Professor was a funny one. He seemed like he stuck his long, thin nose up in the air and sniffed like a critter smelling water. But all the information he got was that a Miss Brown and a Miss Smith was coming.

They came in a big battered touring car, just the two women, no bodyguard, no secret service men. Jim Tedford was right disappointed. He figured they'd be riding in a gold plated chariot, I reckon.

But he was the only one that *was* disappointed. Lisbeth had put on a simple little white dress, and with her brown skin and black hair looked plenty fine. George, he wore just what he always wore. Maybe he was dazzled by Dancy Spencer. Dancy did it up right. He wore a purple shirt with a yeller handkerchief and a calf hair vest. His chaps was white Angora and he had a pair of guns, pearl handled, criss-crossed on his thighs. Even Lisbeth looked a little startled.

The car pulled up and there we was all on hand as a welcoming

committee. A woman slid out from beneath the wheel. Mister, she was as tall as me, with a lantern jaw and a horse face and mouse colored hair. As flat chested as me, too, and pshaw! She didn't have any more hips than a snake! But I liked the way she grinned, and asked me was this the Boxed T and would I help her with the grips.

First thing she did once we got in back of the car was pull out a package of ready made cigarettes and we both lit up. "I reckon," I asked her, "you're the female secretary to this here rich girl?" She nodded and laughed and I could see why Candace Prevost didn't need no man bodyguard. This woman calling herself Mary Smith could have taken care of her as good as me or you.

She thumbed toward the front of the car and I dropped a female hatbox on my bad foot. "That's Candace—er—Brown," said Mary Smith, and bang went the hatbox, just like that.

Candace was being introduced to Lisbeth by Jim Tedford. Ever see two strange dogs bristle up when they meet each other? Same thing was happening. This here Candace —er—Brown was my idea of a candidate for heaven. Not that I didn't appreciate Lisbeth's dark looks, but she had on a plain white dress. Candace, now, was wearing the shortest pair of shorts I ever hope to see in my life, and them shorts was tight where they had a right to be tight! Legs? Brother, they were starting in the house before I had a chance to look at the rest of her! Just as trim and neat and—well, by golly, just as pleasing to look at as a new hair rope! She had a way of walking, too, that was something to see. Once in Denver at a burleycue house I saw—but let's get on. She wore a little thin silk sweater tucked in them shorts, cut plenty low in front, and outside of Lisbeth I never see a woman had a better right to wear a tight silk sweater. I saw them two women smiling at each other and saying sweet things, and I saw Dancy standing there beaming with his eyes all full of admiration and I knew hell wasn't a foot away!

But there was this. Dancy wasn't seeing that shapely body and that pretty face. He was seeing a hundred million dollars.

Mary Smith grinned as we followed them into the house carrying the luggage. "What do you think of her, Limpy?" she asked me. We was already old friends.

So I told her the truth. "She's as pretty as a package of Camels and as dangerous as chain lightning over a bedded herd," I said.

Going through the *patio* they stopped and had to be introduced to McAdams and the Professor. The Professor forgot all about his little sack of rocks and followed right along. McAdams' eyes got wide and it was easy to see he had something to live for at last! That was the way this Candace affected menfolks.

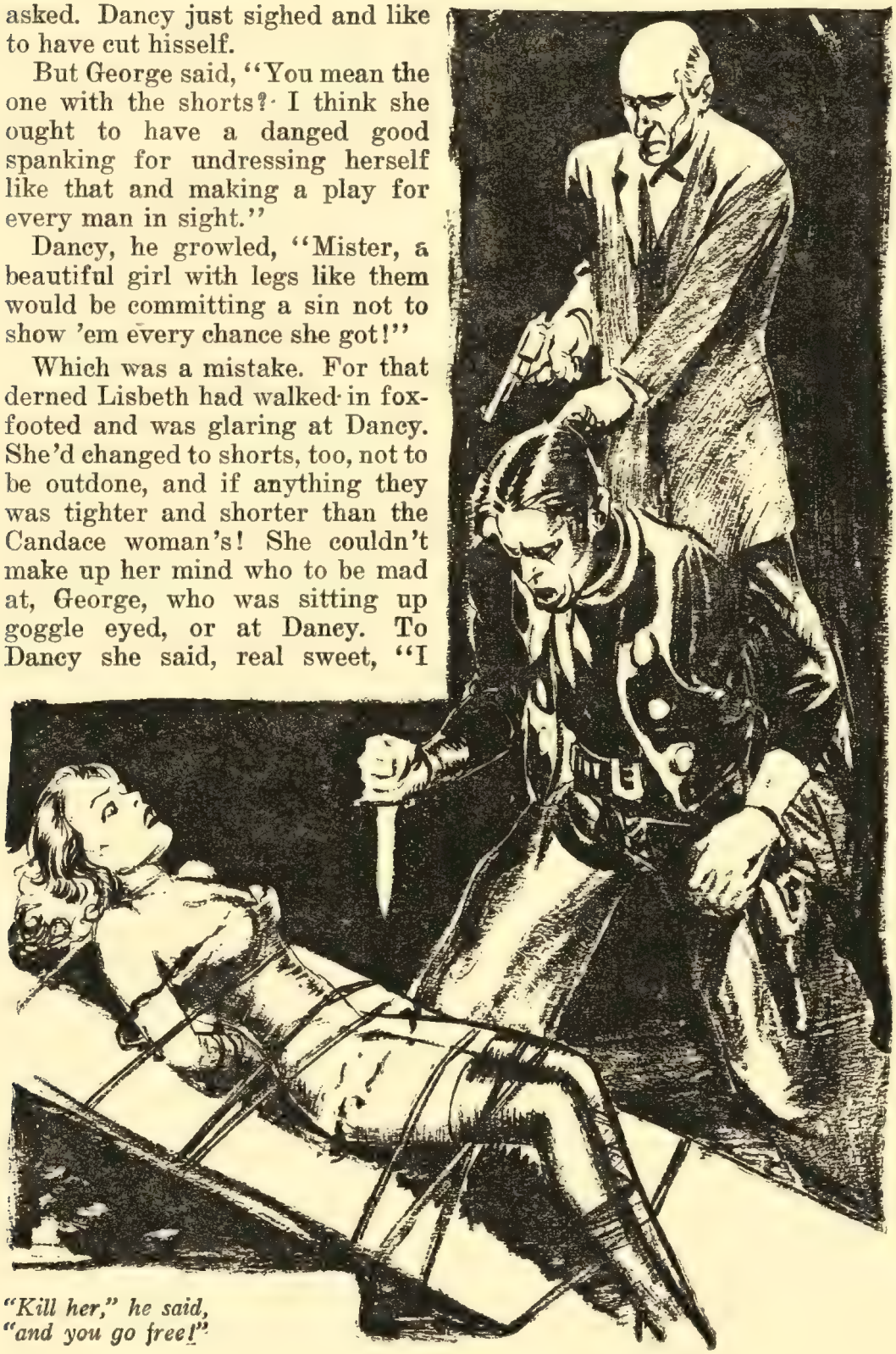
LONG about four o'clock I went in the bunkhouse and found George lying down on his back reading the Police Gazette, and Dancy over at the washbowl shaving hisself. "What you think of this here Candace female?" I

asked. Dancy just sighed and like to have cut hisself.

But George said, "You mean the one with the shorts? I think she ought to have a danged good spanking for undressing herself like that and making a play for every man in sight."

Dancy, he growled, "Mister, a beautiful girl with legs like them would be committing a sin not to show 'em every chance she got!"

Which was a mistake. For that derned Lisbeth had walked in fox-footed and was glaring at Dancy. She'd changed to shorts, too, not to be outdone, and if anything they was tighter and shorter than the Candace woman's! She couldn't make up her mind who to be mad at, George, who was sitting up goggle eyed, or at Dancy. To Dancy she said, real sweet, "I



"Kill her," he said, "and you go free!"

been knowing you two—three years, Mister Spencer and I never knew you to shave twice a day before." And she wheeled on George. "I suppose you think *I* deserve a spanking, too?"

And old George just nodded and said without cracking a smile, "I'd sure admire doing it, ma'am!"

She snapped, "I was sent to tell you that the great Miss—er—Brown desires local color with her meals. The three of you are to eat dinner in the ranchhouse. So bring your troughs and come in around seven." She pranced out swinging them firm little hips sort of impudent like.

Dancy sputtered in the rinse water, burned up.

George, he sighed, and fanned hisself with his Police Gazette, his eyes dreaming and when I asked him politely for a ready rolled, handed me the magazine!

FROM dinner on it was war to the hilt between Lisbeth and this here Candace. Them was the most undressed females I ever saw in my sixty-three years. At first glimpse, just seeing what a man naturally saw above the tabletop you'd a thought they plumb forgot their clothes!

And such sweetness and flashing of smiles and rolling of eyes you never saw. Dancy stirred his coffee with nary a sign of a spoon, and when Candace leaned over toward him to speak softly in his ear, he gulped, nodded, then very carefully laid three pieces of celery on his plate, covered them with gravy and ate them with never a smile.

McAdams wasn't much better. He couldn't take his eyes off Candace Jones. And the Professor! Goggle eyed as they come! Even Jim Tedford put on his best Kansas City I-kiss-your-hand-ma'm manner. It was plumb disgusting.

I sat at one side next to Mary Smith and she enjoyed it about as much as I did. When something particular funny happened, she'd punch me with her knee and wink. Dern her, she was a nice one. Right after dinner when the Professor and McAdams and Dancy was showing Miss Candace around the *patio* she broke out a package of Camels and we sat there smoking and talking for a long time. If it hadn't have been for George, I'd felt right sorry for Lisbeth. But he took her outside, and later when I went to bed there was nobody in sight in the *patio*. Not a soul.

Don't get the idea I like to eavesdrop like a lot of old folks. But during the next few days I did seem to run into a lot. Mary Smith took to hanging around the corrals with me after the rest had gone riding or swimming or something. After the first morning Lisbeth found herself out of her class and stayed to home. Old George was suited just fine at that. It did me right good to see them two together and to figure—like I figgered then—that at last old Dancy, the drugstore cowboy, was being cut out.

And on the other hand I hated to see him making so much headway with Miss Candace. He'd hold her stirrup for her, and she'd squeal and catch him around the neck, and McAdams and the Professor would glare. She had a way of dressing that really got a man, I tell you. Even in a riding habit she made a

fellow's blood start pounding and throbbing.

The only man on the ranch that didn't follow her around besides me, of course, was George. All he'd do would be glare at her and mutter about how women like that ought to get licked until they knew enough to wear more clothes. I even liked him for that.

Lisbeth liked him, too. Else why would they hunt out that spot down in the *mimbre* by the creek, and sit there all afternoon plenty close together. And when he'd put his arm around her and kiss her she didn't seem to mind and helped out all she could, regardless of how close she pressed against him! I figured at last she had a man good enough for her, by golly and I was tickled to death.

Until the fourth night. But first let me tell you about the fourth afternoon. Lisbeth and George wasn't using the glade in the *mimbre,* and I was smoking there when I heard footsteps. I got back in the bushes and it was Miss Candace and Dancy! She was wearing her ridikilus shorts and he was decked out like a house afire!

They sat down there beside the creek laughing and talking and she sort of leaned back, her hands beneath her head, her long pink and white legs stretching away. Old Dancy, he couldn't stand it any longer. He leaned and kissed her. He done a derned thorough job of it, too!

After while she stared up at him starry eyed and said, "Did you mean that, Dancy?"

He answered, "Mean it? My God, I'd crawl to hell just to touch your fingers!" Dancy read that in a book.

And dern me if a couple of tears didn't trickle out of her starry eyes. She said, "There's something I've got to tell you, Dancy. I'm—"

He stopped her. "Don't talk, sweet. Nothing you could say would make any difference!" So he kissed her some more, only this time more so, and I got a little attack of rheumatism and tiptoed off.

Back at the bunkhouse George said, "What you grinning at, Limpy?"

And like a fool I took one of his cigarettes and told him. See, I figured he would be tickled because he'd have a clear field with Lisbeth now.

Instead he got all red in the face and thundered, "That two by four imitation of a cow wrangler! Not while I live and learn!"

Which was sort of puzzling. Until that night.

LONG about midnight I heard George roll quiet out of his bunk and tiptoe out the door into the moonlight. I got scared Dancy would follow him and make trouble, for I figured he was going to see Lisbeth, so I stuck along. And you can imagine how I felt when he tossed a little gravel against the window of Miss Candace!

Pretty soon a light came on and he whispered something and by golly, he went right on in through that window! After while I got close and my heart went sick, I tell you! This Miss Candace was standing up sort of proud and defiant, in her little thin nightgown, glaring at George, mad! I thought she

(Continued on page 110)

SIX-GUN NURSE

Steve hadn't even seen his new ranch boss yet, and he didn't see why he should let his men be killed just because of orders from an unknown not to fight back!

"WHAT I'll do," declared Steve Bradley, foreman of the Tilt-6, "Is mosey in thar an' resign. I'm lightin' a shuck for parts whar my back don't itch every time it comes on dark. I'm quittin'."

"Yo're a liar, Steve," drawled "Grit" Harden. He was swabbing out a bullet nick in Steve's shoulder. "Yuh'll keep on ramroddin' the Tilt-6 in spite o' hell, dry gulchers or a lady boss. Yuh done too much to keep this rancho partly unrobbed. Somethin' scare yuh?"

They were in the bunkhouse. Steve winced under Grit's crude surgery. His steady gray eyes were as hot as murder.

"I'm scared o' myself, mister," he said. "I ain't safe to be allowed loose no more with that nurse critter in the blue specks. I'm gittin' tuh see this here J. N. Tolbert pers'nal an' ask do we fight Brand Lorton or do we fold up an' let a thousan' cows become bait for

By LAURENCE DONOVAN

all the buzzards in Barranca County?''

Grit Harden pushed a needle of gut thread ruthlessly through the lead gash in Steve's skin. The wound had been made by a lone gulcher from Brand Lorton's Star-B spread less than an hour before. Steve had attempted to cut barbed wire that had fenced off the Tilt-6 cows from a strip trail leading to the only available waterhole.

Brand Lorton had been making a stab at harassing the Tilt-6 riders for all of the seven years that Steve Bradley had been its ramrod. But Lorton's tactics had never brought a complete showdown.

Then only a month ago, old Harney, the owner at that time,

From behind the oak table came the fastest song of six-guns that Steve had ever heard.

had gone bust in a poker game down at Hermosillo and got himself gunned fatal in a ruckus. The Tilt-6 had been put up at auction.

Steve and Grit Harden had saved their dinero, hoping to buy in the spread at bottom. Brand Lorton also bid for it. But it was discovered that one J. N. Tolbert, from back East, held old Harney's notes. So the Tilt-6 had gone to this Tolbert.

And, up to this time and minute, neither Steve Bradley nor any of his riders had seen the boss, though he had arrived at the Tilt-6 two weeks before, accompanied by two women nurses.

This was the burr under Steve Bradley's saddle at this time. The new owner and his nurses had arrived when Steve and all the riders were on herd. Chung Wu, the Chinese cook, became the only source of information about that.

"New bloss vellee sick man," had been Chung Wu's version of the arrival. "New bloss have to be carried in to bed. Missee Tobe she say mlake him chicken bloth allee time. No see bloss. Missee Tobe and Missee Lee carry him in."

So for two weeks Steve Bradley had been denied the privilege of seeing the new owner. The nurses gave the names of Jane Tobe and Marilyn Lee, and the prim, dark-spectacled Miss Tobe was in complete charge of the sick man.

Steve could well believe that the prim Jane Tobe and the other filly had carried the new owner to his room upstairs in the hacienda. Hell! That slab-sided Tobe critter looked as if she could carry a horse.

And with the report of the new owner's arrival, Brand Lorton had renewed his worrying tactics. Fencing off that waterhole trail. Having hidden gulchers take unexpected shots at Steve and his riders.

But the long-geared Grit Harden, Steve's top rider, didn't believe Steve would quit, even if orders had been conveyed to him by Tolbert through Jane Tobe that there was to be no gun fighting. So Grit was tending Steve's wound and trying to soothe his temper.

"This Tolbert now?" opined Grit. "Yuh cain't blame a sick hombre who's off his feed an' bein' dry nussed day an' night by two female critters for not wantin' a gun ruckus. A tenderfoot like him with no cow sense wouldn't savvy he bought hisself into a range war."

"Jehosophat!" snapped Steve, under the sting of his shoulder nick. "That ain't sayin' I have tuh be exposin' my carcass 'thout the priv'lege o' seein' the boss. I'm through havin' orders purveyed tuh me by that slat-sided, long-geared female. An' that other little filly with legs that are plumb scand'lous. The dumb waddies look at 'em an' git dumber. It ain't decent."

GRIT HARDEN seemed suddenly to have been stricken speechless. His gaze had wandered out through the bunkhouse door. Lamplight from the main house was spraying out over the puncheon porch of the hacienda's long, middle room. Something soft and creamy white and shadowy made a breath-taking silhouette against the lamplight in the doorway.

This Marilyn Lee was a cute filly with fluffy black hair. The contours of her spine-ticklin' legs, all the way from small ankles to tapering thighs, stood out as if etched with a pencil.

So Grit Harden's mouth flopped open. That was bad. His mind had stopped up again. He snicked off the gut thread in Steve's shoulder wound and fidgeted with the rubber butts of his six-guns.

Steve swore and jerked the shirt over his aching shoulder. He reared to his six feet and some inches, seething with indignation.

"Yuh ain't meetin' that doggone filly up in the chaparral ag'in' tonight, Grit!" he rasped. "I've seen too much o' yore goin's-on, an' we've too many damn' complications already! Look at yoreself an' them other ory-eyed waddies!"

The eight other riders were lined up by the fence in the bunkhouse light. One quit singing. One quit whittling. All quit chawing their tobacco. Their minds had stopped up, too.

The little filly in the hacienda doorway had walked back into the room slowly enough to have the outline of her young breast join the shadow parade of her damn' sweet legs. Then—

The big lamp on the long room table went out with a crash.

Somewhere back of the hacienda, up by the wild bronc corral, a six-gun went brrrang-brrrang! The cute, little day nurse let out one screech that would have outdone a whole flock of coyotes.

Steve Bradley swooped his belt and holstered sixes off a chair back and went outside the bunkhouse in one long jump. Grit Harden was already starting toward the hacienda.

"Never mind the filly, she ain't hit!" yelled Steve. "You, Grit, look tuh the remuda! I've been expectin' Lorton tuh make a try at stampedin' the jugheads! It's a trick mebbe tuh pull us off, so's he kin git tuh the new boss himself an' play a bluff hand! Jehosophat! I'm goin' in thar for a showdown pronto!"

Grit Harden, who was so long and thin he looked like he might collapse in the middle, swore at Steve's order, but long-legged it toward the horse corral. Steve strode toward the main ranch house. The long room downstairs was dark now. The only light showed in a window upstairs.

The other riders were grabbing their guns and rushing out of the bunkhouse. Steve shot a command at them over his shoulder.

"Git yore cayuses saddled! Grit'll look after that shootin' ranny! Maybe we're ridin'!"

Brrrang! Instinct caused Steve to throw himself flat. Twice already this afternoon he had been breezed by gulcher lead before a third pot shot had nicked him. Steve had whammed back with his six-guns in defiance of the dictum to maintain peace at any price.

That order had been passed along to him through the night nurse who wore dark blue glasses, rolled her yellow hair in an ugly knot at the back of her head, and dressed in a long and shapeless skirt that wouldn't have stopped up any man's mind.

Steve's guns were in his hands again now. "Bigod!" he gritted. "Tolbert may be too sick to fight,

but it ain't goin' to be at the expense of our hides! I'll git to him an'—"

Brrang! Brrang!

"O-ooh! Gawd!" That was the suddenly pain-filled, desperate voice of Lafe Long, the youngest waddy on the Tilt-6. He had been the last to grab his irons in the bunkhouse.

Steve jerked around. Young Lafe was staggering toward him, his hands pushing against a gaping hole in the side of his neck that was spurting blood between his fingers. Steve forgot about the whining lead as he came to his feet and got to the waddy.

But Steve was too late. Young Lafe couldn't hold back the blood that spouted through his hands and dripped down his body. He fell at Steve's feet and died without uttering another sound.

Steve whipped around. He heard Grit Harden shouting oaths up by the horse corral. Grit's guns whammed until they were emptied. In the following silence, Steve heard a cayuse pounding away on the grade up the Sunblaze Range hogback. There was but a single rider.

"Damn' 'em!" rasped Steve, sick all over as he looked at young Lafe Long's dead face, contorted with the agony of dying. "The same ol' windy! An' this Tolbert lays up all pampered by them women critters an' says the Tilt-6 won't fight!"

By the "same old windy," Steve referred to a brainy scheme of Brand Lorton in his one-sided war upon the Tilt-6. Lorton sent single gulchers and skulkers who could hide, shoot and get away without being identified. Thus he afforded no proof that would stand up in a law court that his men and not some wandering owlhoot had done the gunning.

Grit Harden was striding back from the horse corral. The others had circled the ranchhouse and they were saddling. Grit looked down at Lafe Long's stiffening body.

"So Lorton has done it this time!" he groaned. "Up to now he has done no more than plague the Tilt-6! Jest one gulcher up thar by the corral an' he had the gate poles down! I dusted his boots with lead an' I'd-a drilled his guts if'n I'd knowed he was shootin' fatal! He rode off as I was headin' them jugheads from bustin' out! I got tuh see if'n the little gal's a'right, Steve!"

"I'll be doin' all the seein' about that, Grit!" snapped Steve. "Yuh git Lafe back into the bunkhouse an' be readyin' for a wide open gun ruckus! I'm seein' Tolbert now if I have tuh dab a loop onto the neck o' that long-geared female nurse!"

After Marilyn Lee's scream from the long room of the hacienda there had been no sound. Steve was too good at reading voices to imagine the filly with the pretty legs had been wounded. He glanced up at the dimly lighted window of the sickroom over the porch. He was positive he saw a shadowy figure withdrawing from view. He bit off a short oath.

That would be Jane Tobe. Funny she had not rushed down when she had heard her companion nurse scream. Then Steve recalled the hacienda doors were thick and per-

haps she hadn't heard anything but the guns outside.

STEVE BRADLEY wasn't quick to get his mad up. But the killing of Lafe Long was sending hot blood rushing to his brain. He clumped angrily onto the puncheon porch, looking into the still dark long room.

He heard a fluttering gasp and he bent his neck to keep his head from bumping the top of the doorway as he went in. He scratched a match and groped around until he found another lamp. When it flared up, he saw little Marilyn Lee's dark eyes staring at him. She was crouching in a corner.

"Oh, what—what is it?" she gulped, and her curved lips were

Taken by surprise, Steve tried to turn, clawing for his gun.

almost white. "I've been too scared to move. I guess maybe Jane was asleep and she didn't hear."

"It's all over, Miss Lee," said Steve shortly. He didn't want to add any to her scare. "Little trouble with the jugheads in the hoss corral, that's all."

He had known from the first she was the kind that knew all about what her damn' scrumptious legs did to the waddies. And she was right nice, judging by what Steve knew about her and Grit Harden.

Grit had been meeting her nights for a walk through the chaparral, and Grit wouldn't talk about it. With Grit that was always bad.

So Steve ignored the quick way Marilyn Lee ran her white fingers through her fluffy black hair, and the way she looked him over with provocative approval.

"Then—then it will be all right for me to get a breath of fresh air?" murmured the little nurse. "I need it, being cooped up in the house all day with a sick man."

"Hell, yes!" grunted Steve. "But I reckon yuh'll not be meetin' up with Grit tonight, lady. He's got other business."

She perked her small head on one side and dark eyes looked him over. Her fright was passing and her mouth became red again, and teased into a little pucker.

"You don't like me much, do you, Steve Bradley?" she said softly. "Don't you ever believe in having fun, or don't you think about anything but cows? Jane says you don't."

She glanced down, smoothing her rumpled dress, but not quite making it hide a few inches of ivory skin above her perfect knees. Steve clenched his teeth and deliberately pulled his eyes away from that and the slick expanse of white that sloped downward to her firm young breast.

Damn 'em! Her kind were all alike. All right for Grit, if he liked them that way. Steve didn't believe in fooling around with her sort. He didn't want to think about other men's kisses when he took his own.

"I hadn't thought about likin' yuh," growled Steve. "I never yet cut another man's brand."

"Why, you—"

Her dark eyes blazed and her bosom quivered with rage. But Steve cut in, "Thar's yore boss nurse! Yuh'd best high-tail an' have yore walk!"

Marilyn Lee almost spat at him as she passed, moving through the doorway. Steve looked up and saw the prim Jane Tobe just coming from the bedroom in which this Tolbert was being kept plumb ignorant of the facts of life on the range, especially this Star-B plague of murderin' gulchers.

Jane Tobe's drab cloth skirt hung shapelessly to her shoe-tops. Her straight-cut waist made her look as flat-chested as a man, and her tight-drawn, yellow hair showed her ears and gave her face a hard look below the dark blue glasses.

"What's all this disturbance and shooting, Mr. Bradley?" she said in an even, colorless voice. "I was having a nap, and it wakened me. Mr. Tolbert's worse tonight, and I had to look after him. He was excited, and he doesn't want the cow

riders raising a fuss with their guns. You will see that it—"

Steve took a long stride toward the stairway leading to the gallery around the long room of the hacienda.

"I will see that it don't bust loose again, if I can help it!" he rapped out. "An' I'm comin' up an' explain to this Tolbert himself! It happens I jest had tuh look after one of my own waddies, an' soon as I'm through speakin' my mind to the boss, I'll see that the cow riders, as you call 'em won't be raisin' any fuss. What they'll be raisin' is goin' to be plumb hell!"

"Mr. Bradley!" The prim nurse's voice crackled. "I'll have you understand—that Mr. Tolbert is a sick man and—"

Something in the grim, implacable set of Steve's hard jaw must have caught her eye, for she hesitated. Then she said suddenly, "I didn't quite catch what you said about looking after one of the riders? What is it? Is he hurt? Can I do something?"

Steve's booted foot was already on the lower step.

"It's too late to do anything for him, thanks," he said shortly. "He's past bein' herded by any nurse. Now I'll see Tolbert an'—"

FOR the second time tonight a six-gun brrranged close to the hacienda. Jane Tobe had just said, "You mean he's dead?" This time the lamp was not the target of the smashing lead. A slug slammed into the round top of the newel post on the stairway beside Steve.

Taken by complete surprise, Steve tried to turn, lightning hands clawing for his low-slung sixes. The silver rowel of his boot heel caught on the step and Steve fell sideways to his knees. The fall saved him, for the second bullet made a wind through his rusty hair, it was so close.

But the fall prevented Steve from bringing up his gun. The third explosion thundered into the hacienda, sounding like double six-guns blasting. Steve had just glimpsed the gun flash at a window of the long room. The lead plucked at his shirt sleeve and splintered a stairstep.

But in the window a man's bearded face reared briefly into view and a hoarse oath of pain roared from his mouth. The windowsill was gouged by a bullet and the slug went somewhere into the window gulcher's carcass.

Steve was up, but not in time to thumb an iron at the disappearing head and shoulders. But he knew the hombre had been hit. And when he looked up, the prim Jane Tobe was pushing a still smoking six-gun under her shapeless skirt and her eyes were still fixed upon the window.

"Well, I'll be—" began Steve, jaw dropping as he looked at the sudden flaming difference in the nurse's face.

"Damn!" finished Jane Tobe with a snap of her teeth. "I had to do it, Mr. Bradley! I saw the gun pointing at you and he couldn't keep on missing you all night! Besides, you were trying to tell me a rid—waddy—was murdered, weren't you?"

"Yes—yes—Miss Tobe—" stammered Steve. "By cracky, lady! That was a plumb center an' teetotally onexpected shot! I'm—

thankin' yuh, ma'am, an' I'd admire tuh apologize for the way I was talkin'—"

"You can pass over that, Mr. Bradley," the nurse interrupted stiffly. "I didn't think—I'm sorry you saw the gun in my hand—I—hadn't you better go see about whoever that was? I'm afraid I hurt him badly and—I have to go to Mr. Tolbert."

Just then Steve heard the crashing of ocotillo bushes beyond the window and shouts coming from the direction of the bunkhouse. He shot toward the window, making a clean dive through it and landing half on his feet.

He heard the prim Jane Tobe cry out as he caught his balance.

"Come back, Steve Bradley—I—Mr. Tolbert won't back up any gunplay—he—"

She was in the flooding yellow lamplight. Her dark glasses had fallen off. The knot of her hair had come loose and let the hair cascade in a cloud about her face. Although he didn't pause, but lunged onward toward the noise in the ocotillo bushes, Steve's flashing glimpse of the night nurse caused his breath to catch.

The thought percolated through his brain that it was damn' funny what a difference a woman's eyes and hair could make, or maybe he was a little dizzy with appreciation of her shooting that had probably saved him from being punctured. For it seemed to him he had seen the prettiest face within his recollection. Maybe it was the yellow lamplight?

STEVE went over the low hacienda fence. He hadn't caught a glimpse of the hombre who had tried to gulch him, so he judged the sneaking gunnie from the Star-B hadn't been badly hit. But there was another quick stirring in the bushes.

Steve whipped up both guns and triggered them in a one-two blast. As the lead whistled into the chaparral he heard a quick, little cry. His breath almost stopped. It was the scared voice of the little nurse, Marilyn Lee.

"Great jehosophat!" gritted Steve. "I didn't think o' the little filly bein' up here!"

He jammed his irons back into the leathers, making for the clump of soap bushes rising from a mound of grama grass. There was no movement there, no further outcry. Cold sweat beaded Steve's forehead. He might have gunned the little nurse mortally.

Just then Grit Harden's edged voice rang out up above the hacienda.

"Thar goes the pizen skunk, fellers! Seen 'im make his hoss an' head into thet barranca! Fork yore broncs an' put a loop around it! The fust one sees 'im, let 'im have it in the gullet!"

The shadowy figures of the Tilt-6 riders showed in a line beyond the upper end of the hacienda over toward the horse corral. Grit was heading the pursuit and his commands snapped out.

"Guess he must o' gunned Steve!" yelled one of the riders.

Steve had no time to correct that. He was down on his hands and knees, crawling under the barrier of thorns in the soap bush. He made out a white figure lying in the grama grass. Steve reached

the little nurse, swearing bitterly under his breath. Suddenly his breath went out of his lungs.

Marilyn might be either dead or alive, but such a sight had never before greeted Steve's bugging eyes. The cute little nurse apparently had been frightened by the new gunplay and she must have made a plumb reckless dash into the thorny bushes.

If he was any judge of a knockout punch, Marilyn would be out for some time.

Dead or alive, all of her sweet and dainty person was stripped down to some gauzy things, the like of which Steve Bradley had seen in the ads of magazines but hadn't really believed until now ever were worn by women critters.

She was lying with one lovely, curved leg partly drawn up and with her round, white arms shielding her face, as if that had been where the lead had hit her. A chilly shudder went through Steve's lanky body. He would rather have collected a slug in his innards than have put a hand upon her body, and he was sick all over as he gently touched her arms and pushed them aside.

The starlight gave just enough light to show that her eyes were closed, and her piquant face with the sweet, red-lipped mouth showed no bullet mark. Well, Steve closed his own eyes and put one hand down over her heart.

If the soft curve under the girl's breast had been a hot branding iron against his fingers, Steve wouldn't have known the difference. He couldn't feel her heart beat because his own pulse was pounding at his temples.

"If she's dead—" He whispered it and shook off his own chill as he put his ear down where his hand had been.

There was a sudden trembling and a convulsive movement of the beautiful white body. Two soft, clinging arms suddenly slipped around his neck and the little nurse gasped, "Grit! Grit! He said you wouldn't come—he—"

Steve's veins flooded with relief so swiftly he felt weak. And when moist, parted lips suddenly sought his mouth, and the arms went tighter about his neck, he discovered he was returning the kiss with savage intensity.

Then—

The trembling contours of her slim, curved form were against him, and her bosom was crushed to his wool shirt. He tried to choke out a hard oath from away deep in his throat, but he only gulped and hadn't the strength to put her away.

"I know—I know it's you, Steve Bradley—" She was murmuring, her voice low ecstasy as her quivering figure caused Steve's brain to go proddy in spite of himself. He had never believed that one of her kind ever could touch him, but his hands along her yielding back were cold, and his spine was even colder.

"Damn' yuh!" he grunted, even as her head went slowly back under the pressure of his mouth. "I ought tuh be—"

He was meaning to say he ought to be going for a cayuse and riding after Grit Harden and the other waddies. But what he meant to say and what he meant to do didn't matter a hoot in hell for the next few seconds.

He tried to think maybe it was his relief at knowing his bullets had missed her, but in the minute or two that followed he knew almighty well his own mind had been stopped up, like the sight of the little nurse had got Grit Harden and the other boys.

Steve could hear faint shouts, and the still conscious part of his brain told him that Grit and the Tilt-6 waddies were helling away out of the nearest barranca and off toward the Sunblaze Range hog-

back in pursuit of the Star-B gunnie. And he himself had given them orders for a showdown gun ruckus.

Whether this alone would have freed him from the demanding eagerness of the little nurse's kisses he never found out. For something else caused him suddenly to lift his hands and grip the girl's shoulders, holding her firmly.

"Keep quiet," he grated in a low tone. "Don't move. Don't make no sound."

THE slithering movement of several figures nearby in the chaparral was borne to his keen ears. Men were slipping through the concealment of the thorn bush toward the hacienda. A low, hard voice spoke with the caution of quick command.

"Buck run the windy on 'em! Steve Bradley an' his rannies are high-tailin' to hell an' gone after him! He'll run 'em all the way tuh the hogback gap! We'll git this sneakin' gopher Tolbert an' fire the buildings! 'Fore we're through with Tolbert, he'll sign over the Tilt-6 or he won't be needin' no more nurses!"

Steve's nerves went as taut as a dallied lass rope. So that was the play! All the gunnin' had been to lead the Tilt-6 riders away on an elusive trail. For it was the hard voice of Brand Lorton talking, and he had without doubt kept a few of his toughest gun slick hombres in waiting for the Tilt-6 waddies to clear his way.

So Brand Lorton was going after this new owner, Tolbert, personally. Dammit! Steve knew the kind of persuasion Lorton could hand out. A tenderfoot easterner with no cow sense, and a sick man to boot, would not have a chance. Lorton would have the Tilt-6 signed over to him, if he had to use a hot branding iron to get that signature.

They intended to fire the buildings? Maybe Lorton was figuring on outright murder? If the hacienda and the barns went up in smoke, and the sick owner proved to be stubborn, he might end up as buzzard bait and the nearly lawless range be none the wiser. Those who went into the matter would be made to believe Tolbert had died in the fire.

"Please, Steve," murmured Marilyn Lee. "I'm scared. What can you do? Oh, I'm sorry I—"

"Yuh needn't be noways sorry," grated Steve. "If it hadn't been for you—for me—if I'd rode off with Grit an' the others, Lorton would o' had a clean sweep. Yuh stay right here. Don't yuh show yoreself no matter what kind o' ruckusin' yuh hear. I'm—"

"But Steve—Jane?" gasped the little nurse. "Oh, she's down there in the house, and she's all alone—please, I've got tuh help some way—I ain't afraid—you don't know what I mean—"

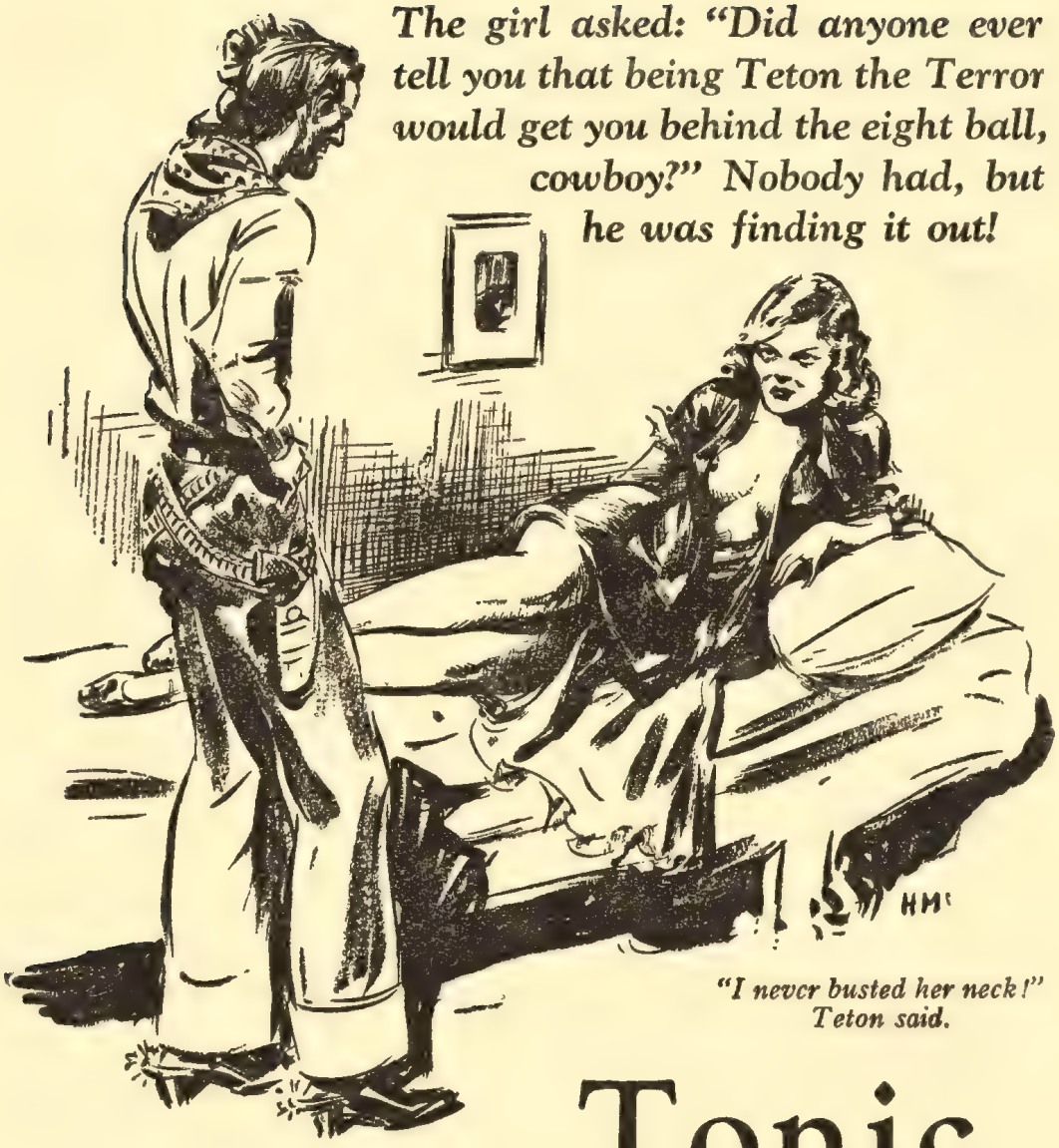
"Shut up!" commanded Steve. "Yup! I guess yuh got that kind o' grit under all yore softness—so—"

He had an idea what would happen if the little nurse ever fell into the hands of Lorton's gunnies, 'specially seein' her lack of any decent duds. So it had to be—

His hard palm snapped up and the heel of his hand caught the soft

(Continued on page 96)

The girl asked: "Did anyone ever tell you that being Teton the Terror would get you behind the eight ball, cowboy?" Nobody had, but he was finding it out!



"I never busted her neck!" Teton said.

Tonic for a Terror

By CLEM CARLSON

TETON O'DAY woke up in a strange room, with a woman he'd never seen before sleeping peacefully too doggone near him!

First had come a tortured awakening. Teton O'Day had opened his bloodshot blue eyes. He winced and closed them hurriedly. He groaned, moved his thick tongue

experimentally toward his lips and stirred up a taste relative and remindful of ancient, Sampsonesque limburger cheese.

He raised a trembling hand, moved one foot. Damned if he didn't have his hat on—and his boots and spurs! He turned on his side and opened his eyes more slowly.

"Ohhhh," he blatted. "Ohhhh, sacred Hades!"

The girl lay on her back, a shapely outline under the sheet drawn under her chin. Teton shriveled a little, trying to take cover within himself. He seemed to peer through a fog as his frantic glance turned toward a door and swept the room.

A woman's room, all right. Curley-top paper on the wall, little frilly pillows like chunks cut off a bucking roll here and there, and a lot of fancy odors a hand never smelled around a rodeo or Wildwest and Bill shows. Not a bad scent, at that.

"Sweetheart of a nightmare," Teton moaned, "I hope they ain't a maw or paw or big bad brother handy hereabouts. I—migod, you ain't a *Missus* by any chance?"

Teton rolled. His spurs wound into the bottom sheet and he hit the floor with face and hands, kicked and pulled and finally got free. He jumped up and backed against the wall. His gray Jay-Bee was jammed down until it thrust his ears out like a pair of batwing chaps. He grunted and cussed as he swiveled it and yanked it off.

"Lady, how'n hell did we come to *be* here?"

He waited for her to rouse. A lot of disconnected recollections miseried his mind. He'd ridden into the town of Tule the afternoon before. Pleasure before business, so he'd gone into the Hava Snort Saloon. And had several snorts, without bothering to have a bite to eat.

He remembered the blond dance hall girl. Her name. . . Yeah! . . . Cora Nance. A sweet armful, all right enough. They had danced and drank and had gone to her room to drink some more. She had been provocative and a plump armful, he recalled. He didn't remember much after that. Another drink, darkness, a blind wandering. He sort of remembered a man —but not the man's looks. Remembered crashing glass and a feminine scream, and then arguing with somebody. . .

He caught sight of himself in the mirror of a dresser, and knew his bleared sight wasn't all a Barleycorn souvenir. No wonder his foolish face hurt! His left eye was —Sacred Hades! Looked like the goose had laid a purple egg this time.

He scratched his reddish-shingled topknot and swore. Said goose had a brother—no, sister—who'd planted a twin fowl fruit on his dome.

"Lady!" Teton croaked, stepping back toward the bed. "Wake up." It wasn't the dance hall girl, Cora Nance. Teton begged, "Lady, who're you, an' who'm I—I mean, where am I?"

He stopped. "Lady, you're awake. Stop layin' there with your eyes open . . . open. . ."

The way she stared, her eyes dull, set, reminded Teton of a dead man. He reached forth a trembling

hand and touched her face. It was clammy and rigid, and the breath left Teton with a *whoosh:* "Migod, she's dead!"

How had he gotten here? Had he killed her? What the hell, oh sacred Hades, now what the hell?

HIS mind was too stunned, his nerves too shot to give a thing like this a contest ride. He swapped ends a couple times, then crowhopped for the door. He yanked it open and plunged into a little living room, fell across a chair and went down on his hands and knees.

He gawped at the flurry of covers that started on a red plush sofa along the wall. Someone had bedded down in here, and his abrupt, cyclonic entrance had startled them awake.

He saw a pair of bare, trim feet aim for the floor. Slender ankles, dimpled knees, snowy thighs swam into sight before a soft nightgown slithered downward to cover them.

A girl with dark, tumbled hair, deep wide eyes and a generous red mouth—a kissable mouth—sat up and stared at him. As she pulled a quilt over her legs, Teton let his good eye range on bare white shoulders. The neck of the nightgown was low and loose. The swell of her bosom started above, and was not too well hidden by the thin garment.

The girl flushed, pulled the quilt up higher and looked indignant. He looked pretty sorry and sort of funny, with his fist-marked eye, strained face and opened mouth.

The girl laughed, and it seemed to make her angry with herself. "Get up from there!" she commanded.

"Miss, who's the lady in there in that bed? What'd she die from? Migod, she's done stiffened out. She—"

The girl eyed him thinly, as though trying to make up her mind. She wrapped the quilt around her and stood up. She motioned Teton to sit down, had a look into the bedroom and hesitated, putting her face straight before she went into the kitchen. She returned with a water glass containing a generous dose of whiskey. He managed to gulp it and sat shuddering while she rolled him a cigarette.

She sat down in a chair facing him.

"Did anyone ever tell you this business of being Teton the Terror would get you behind the eight ball, cowboy?" the girl demanded sharply. "Teton O'Day, the hell-raising hero of rodeos and wild-west shows. The two-fisted drinking and fighting man who takes his liquor and holds it, loves his girls and leaves them. That's you, and don't deny it."

"Well'm, right now, that suh—seems to fit—sorry to say."

"If you weren't in the cactus corral you're in, you'd make love to me, break my heart to get even with me. Or—maybe you'd break my neck." She looked toward the closed door.

"I—I never busted her neck! *No!*" Teton started to shake more violently. "Tell me I didn't. Tell me what happened, an' who she is. An' who you are."

"Last night, I heard a scream. I came out of my house, and there

you were on the porch, a woman in your arms. You said you were being chased, and had to come in. I knew the girl. She told me, not long ago, she was getting married to a man who was coming here. A man named Teton O'Day. I thought you two had gotten married and celebrated a bit too much because terms of a will had been fulfilled and the O'Day ranch wouldn't run downhill any more.

"I guessed maybe you'd fought with Kane Drago and run this way. Anyhow, I gave up my room. I heard you quarreling in there. Finally you got mad and swore you hated her. It got awfully quiet then. And I went to sleep."

"Migod, who is she?" Teton almost yelled.

"Don't you know? I understand you let it be known you had returned to Tule to settle an estate and see to it no woman would get the idea you'd marry her just to grab a worthless chunk of land.

"You said you'd not marry a hatchet-faced, grasping old heifer —You spilled a lot of things. Mostly in a letter to a lawyer before you came back to Tule. You see, I knew that girl you were yammering about, and called a heifer. Her name is Maureen Dell."

"Please!" Teton begged. "Never mind you know so much. Who's that woman in there?"

"Last night, when you were staggering around in there, you kept calling her Maureen Dell."

"Sacred Hades!" Teton choked. "I was drunk, an' kilt her. After that letter I wrote to the lawyer, Asia Rayne, I got no chance a-tall! I never knew she was Maureen Dell. I ain't seen her since she was a lank-legged, freckled calf who cried an' wanted to take over me every time I got bucked off a brawnk an' got a scratch. Y'see, she was the orphant gal of a ol' time pal of my paw's." He shivered. "I figgered she'd growed to be a sharp-nosed—"

"That won't save you, Teton. Maybe you wish now you did have someone to cry over you and be afraid for you. Maybe you wish you'd not been such a battler, a rodeo hero saddle-bumming into women's hearts, making light love to them. Maybe you're praying you hadn't tried to hold so much liquor."

"I—That's right." He buried his face in his hands. "I was a li'l tipsy. But I never drank *that* much. I remember that Cora-Nance openin' a fresh bottle. That's about all."

"Couldn't see Asia Rayne and Miss Dell before you got so drunk you were out on your feet," the girl sniffed. "First thing you hit town you start your Teton the Terrible tactics. Teton the Terrible! Sounds good when you come out on a bucking horse, with a yellow silk shirt and silver fixings flying. But what has it gotten you?

"You've nothing to show. No money, no respect for anyone, nobody to care for you. You need a pistol-whipping tonic, Teton."

"I know it. But it comes too late. This Kane Drago, now. Who'd he be?"

"A man who is very interested in the O'Day ranch. When your father died, O'Day, he willed the ranch to you, providing Maureen Dell had a say in things and you'd

stop being a self-made heartbreaker, hero and terror—"

"The terror part was just steam to get folks to come to the Bill shows or rodeos I was in. I—I did have a hot temper," Teton gulped. "That made 'er easier to live up to the name."

"Anyhow, if you didn't do as Miss Dell willed, you'd lose the ranch. Because if you didn't behave and work hard, the O'Day ranch couldn't pay out after several years of bad going. As I said, Drago Kane is very interested. He owns a ranch touching the O'Day spread. Owns a gambling house and saloon. It's called the Hava Snort. Ever hear of it?"

"Bigod," Teton sprang up. "That's it! He aims to get the ranch. Sicked that Cora Nance on me—"

"Teton, you sicked yourself into that. Aren't you into enough trouble? Still want to be a terror?"

"No." He said weakly. "If I had a chance again, I'd quit hellin' all over an' gettin' no place. I swear I would."

The girl arose, held the quilt around her and walked into the bedroom. Teton refused to follow until she commanded him.

He kept his eyes averted from the bed. The girl said, "Take hold of her, Teton O'Day. Get her out of that bed."

"No! I ain't so low. She stays there. I ain't hidin' this. I'm still man enough to take my medicine —an' the rope I'm certain to get. I'll tell the sheriff."

"So you are a man down underneath when the crust you've put on is cracked," the girl said. "Well, be man enough to take her out of that bed." She pulled at him.

TETON O'DAY closed his eyes. He groped under the cover. A cheap dress was rumpled up around the waist as he slipped his hands under the cold, board-stiff body.

Hell, he never knew a woman to be so light. He stood up and opened his eyes. He dropped the burden he held. There was a brittle sound, a crunching sound. The head rolled toward the bed, lusterless hair loosening. An arm flattened out and a leg twisted forward at the knee.

Teton O'Day cried "Sacred Hades!" and sagged down on the side of the bed.

"If you hadn't been so drunk last night, and had such a shaky morning after," the girl said, "you'd have noticed it was 'Queen Saphronia' you had with you. 'Queen Saphronia' is the pride and joy—or *was*—of Miss Nellie Trask, who is sharp-tongued and fifty and runs the millinery and clothes shop for women. Queen Saphronia was her window dummy. 'Only wax dress model this side of Denver,' Nellie Trask used to brag."

Teton O'Day leaped to his feet. His face flushed as he thought of the way he miseried and groaned around. Anger rose in him. He looked down at the dark-haired girl who turned her heart-shaped face up to him, full lips twitching.

He ought—bigod, he ought to spank her! His reaction, his relief from abject misery ran another trail then. Blinding sunlight seemed to flood his lifting soul. He wanted to kiss this girl. Hell—deep

within himself, he knew he'd been wanting to kiss her all his life. Here was the answer: he'd just played around with other girls because this moment, this girl was in his future.

"Wah-hoo!" yowled Teton O'Day. He grabbed the girl and lifted her in his arms. The quilt slipped off as he hugged her gasping figure to him and the supple, warm pressure of her body under the thin gown thrilled him as nothing else ever had. No swaggering before rodeo crowds, no drinking and brawling, no woman had lifted his self esteem and had made him feel so much like taking on the world before.

The girl struggled in his arms, then one arm stole around his neck. For one delicious, delirious moment her lips responded. He felt the soft pressure of her breast on his; the pound of her heart beneath.

Then she slapped him and stood back.

"You don't even know my name!" she shamed him.

"I know what I'll change 'er to," he told her. "What is it now?"

"It might be a lot of things. I won't tell you now. And you won't change it, either. I wouldn't take the name of a man who wouldn't shoulder responsibilities and settle down. You ran off to be a wildwest tramp. Now that your father is dead, you'll almost have to marry Maureen Dell. It will be easier under the thumb of a wife."

"I'm ready to settle down an' all. But I'm damned if I'll marry a sharp-faced heifer growed out of the pest that kid useta be."

"Perhaps she loved you, and admired you, and so, feared for you in your wildness even then," the girl said, pointing to the living room. "Go in there until I'm dressed."

"Just the same," he called after she closed the door, "I *ain't* goin' to marry her. I'll put this Kane Drago gent in his place, an' do what I can to help the squawlin' heifer, but that's as far as I go."

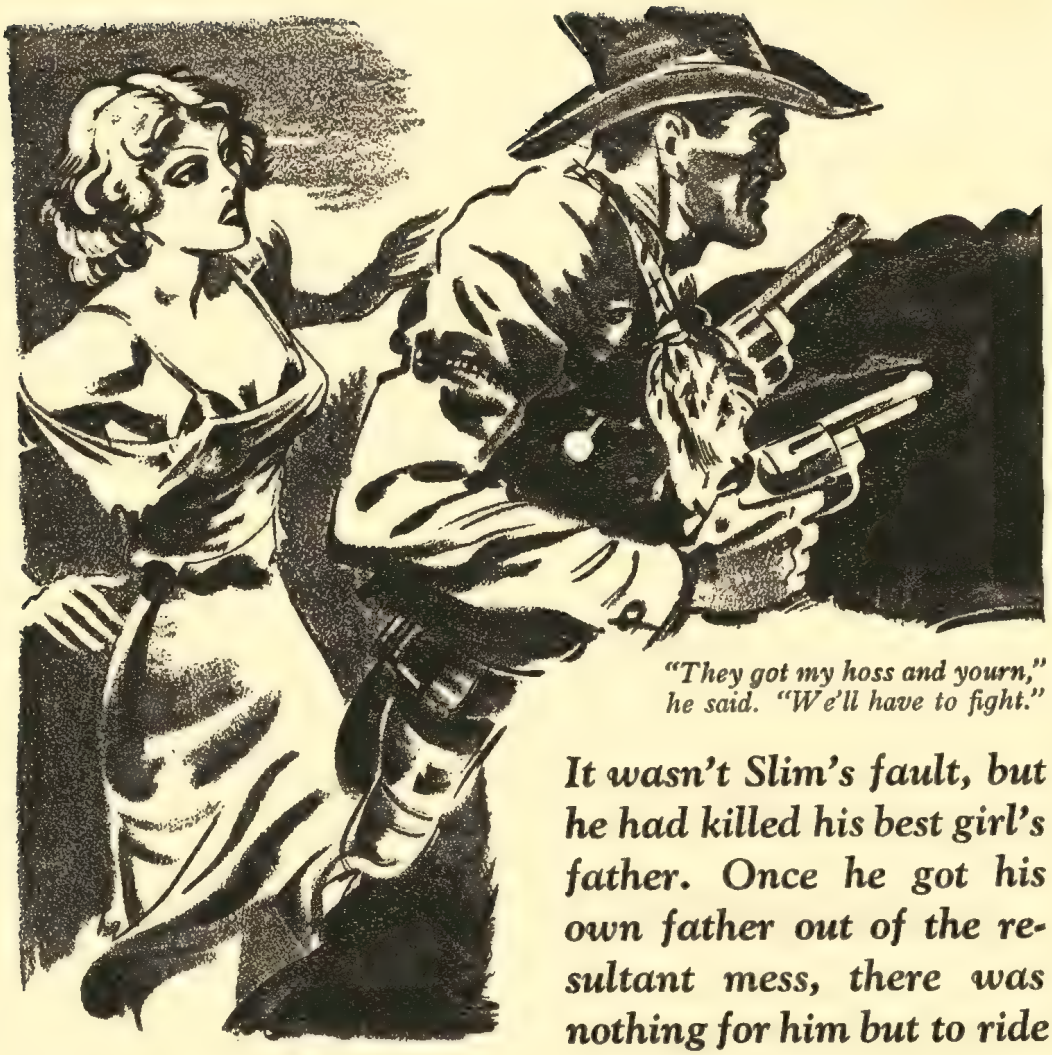
HE MOVED around the room, lifted a lace curtain and looked out. The little cottage he was in was on a slope that led down to the main street of Tule. Comfortable log buildings lined the street. He scowled at the sign of the Hava Snort Saloon, and put his attention to the new railroad tracks at the end of the street.

Yep. Tule would sure be a better town now. That railroad hadn't been here when Teton tailed out six or seven years ago. Otherwise, save there were new names, lots of new faces, the place was about the same. The railroad would help the hard-pressed cowmen to come back out of the red, he figured.

This cottage hadn't been here when he'd left. He turned his head. The low north neck of Quake Lake showed there. He knew, of course, the huge lake stretched back toward the O'Day ranch, at the foot of the Fir Ledge Hills.

A great cow country, and Teton knew it. He saw it in a different light now. He'd been helling, drifting and not thinking much about real range and people until that girl in there brought him up short. Now he knew what he'd missed,

(Continued on page 90)



"They got my hoss and yourn," he said. "We'll have to fight."

It wasn't Slim's fault, but he had killed his best girl's father. Once he got his own father out of the resultant mess, there was nothing for him but to ride

You Can't Fight a Woman

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

"SLIM—don't!" the red haired girl protested. Her voice was tremulous, and her eyes were misty in the moonlight. "I've got to get home before dad gets back from town. He'd kill me if he knew—"

Reluctantly, Slim Crane let Madge slip from his arms. For a moment, he watched her pat her disheveled hair into shape, and smooth out the blouse that a close embrace had pulled all awry. "Shucks, honey," he answered,

broad mouth twisting ruefully, "what do you low *my* old man'd do if he knew about *me,* sneaking away like this?"

Madge's sigh, and the way she laced her fingers behind her finely poised head as she leaned back against the rock that sheltered them brought pert young curves into charming relief as her blouse drew taut.

Slim watched the play of moonlight accentuate her beauty. He abstractedly ran his finger tips over his thumb, as though still trying the texture of a fine fabric. He was thinking, "Gosh . . . she's wearin' silk . . . an' she smells nicer every time. . . ."

Madge Daley in gingham was fascinating enough to make him a traitor to every cow country tradition. As she slowly rose and smoothed out her rumpled skirt, he caught her hand. "Honey—I don't think my dad's going to have time to cut your bob-wire fences again, not fo' a spell, no-how."

A frown puckered her smooth brow. They had not until this moment mentioned the feud that forced them to meet on the sly. Then her eyes brightened. "Oh—Slim! You mean, he's getting reasonable?"

Slim Crane loved Madge enough to swallow the unintended jab. "No, dang it! There's a passel of skunks beefing our critters. Killin' 'em and hauling 'em off."

"And that," Madge said, a sly bit of malice creeping into her voice, "is even worse than a nester putting a fence about his lawful property?"

"Aw, blazes, honey!" He tried to be grim, but he simply could not, so he tried to laugh it off. "You and your pappy don't understand *nothing.* Look-ee here. My dad and his'n, afore him, fit the Injuns to get this yere country. They starved, froze, kilt varmints and Mexicans and brought cow critters into this corner of what used to be forsaken hell.

"Now a bunch of galoots in Washington pass laws, giving nesters the rights to settle down, put fences aroun' the water holes our critters need—"

"But Slim, darling." She sadly shook her head. "Your cows aren't hungry and they're not thirsty!"

"Makes no difference!" He stubbornly shook his tow head. "Fust drought that comes along, the Diamond C critters won't have a thing to drink except whar your pappy's squatted."

"He's not a squatter!" she flared. "He's a homesteader!"

"I don't give a tarnation damn!" He snatched his hat and jammed it on his head. "Between homesteaders and this new passel of varmints that's beefing our critters and selling 'em in Paso del Norte, we'll git shoved to the wall."

"Why—you—you—putting my father in the same class with beef thieves!" She slapped him, and it sounded like a pistol shot. "Thieves, are we! You listen here, Slim Crane! Your father, the pig headed old fossil, *he's* a thief! Tearing down a mile of barbed wire that cost dad every cent he made—"

"Made outen hogging our water hole!"

BUT Madge was in the saddle, galloping recklessly from the grove toward the section that Herb Daley, lawfully enough, had "proved up." Crane, just as sore, mounted his blue roan, and growled, "Gol dang my hide, she's a snake, like all them nesters! Thief, huh?"

But as he rode, he had more and more difficulty in keeping his rage white hot. He could not forget those stolen moments when Madge looked up, lashes drooping and lips half parted for a kiss; he could not forget how a runaway team had flung her into his arms, that day before he knew that she was the daughter of the first nester to come to Arroyo Rojo.

For the next few days, he tended strictly to business, scouting around the vast Diamond C spread, ready for a clash with beef thieves. The coming of the railroad to Paso Del Norte had started a boom; hundreds of pilgrims, gamblers, dance-hall women, business men and railroad contractors had poured into town, and all the newcomers needed steak—principally, it seemed, from the Diamond C herd.

Brand inspectors, supposedly, were scrutinizing each hide at the slaughterhouses, checking them against bills of sale. But the inspectors were either drunk, blind, or bribed. And old man Crane was madder than a hornet. His line riders had made no progress. Thus Slim's father was in the saddle, stalking thieves as he once had tracked down marauding Comanches.

"Way I figger it out," the old man said, pointing, "is that they're fixing to turn a trick over yonder. Judgin' from old wagon tracks, and the lay of the land, it's got to be."

"Why'n't y'all put our riders over there, then?"

Crane spat, shook his grizzled head. "Son," he said, patting the stock of "Jezebel", his buffalo gun, "when I tends to varmints, I tends to 'em. Jails ain't wuth a damn! Less company, the better. Now, you ride over that-away, up through that gulch."

Stealthily, with muffled hoofs and curb chain to silence his advance, Slim went up the gulch. The full moon cast black shadows, but in the open, the shooting would be good, if it came to that. He hoped it wouldn't. It had been bad enough when Madge's dad had just missed stopping a hatful of .45s, that day when the first fence had been destroyed.

He rather wondered why Madge had continued meeting him. She probably reckoned he'd saved her life, or something. Then, because he'd indirectly called her old man a thief, she'd gone hog wild. Women are sure as hell funny critters.

When Slim heard vague sounds some distance ahead, he crept forward on foot, his Winchester ready. If he got the drop on them, a killing might be avoided. His father would not shoot unarmed men, not even thieves. The old man liked to startle them into going for a gun, which was pretty nearly always fatal—for the other fellow.

Slim wondered if his dad's skill was what it had been, thirty years ago. A man couldn't keep that up forever. Not even a good one. He

was vaguely worried. A premonition urged him to hurry, and to hell with noise.

A wagon was just discernible in the shadows of a grove, out there in the open. The very silence was ominous. Slim squatted, straining his eyes to outwit the treacherous blend of shadow and blue-white glare. A twig crackled. Someone whispered, "There's the old son of a—! Yonder—"

The thunderous boom of a buffalo gun cut into that. A horse screamed, wood splintered, and wagon tires rattled over the rocky outcropping as the team bolted.

THEN Slim went wild. It would take the old man just a split second to shove another cartridge into "Jezebel", but three rifles were crackling, and Crane, enraged by his bad shot, was roaring more loudly than his .60 caliber gun.

Slim raked the flame stabbed shadows with his Winchester. A man yelled. The kid's gun jammed. He drew his Colt and charged, cursing as he fired.

The silence in his father's quarter froze him. They'd killed him! A man broke from the shadows. He doubled up, cut down by a pair of slugs. Then Jezebel's blast drowned every other sound.

The old man bobbed up from cover, a .45 in each hand. But two men escaped his wrath. They reached their saddle mounts, and galloped hell bent. When father and son met at the overturned wagon, they found only one raider, his own blood mingled with that of three butchered beeves.

"Had ye worried, heh?" old man Crane chuckled.

"Gosh, pap, you sure did!" Slim was shaking all over.

Then he felt sick. His mouth sagged, and the gun fell from his hands. His father, striking a match, was kneeling beside the dead man, and sombrely shaking his head. "By God," he mourned, "I shore *am* gittin' old. Wan't old Jezebel that got this jasper, after all. Yes, sir, I'm shore gittin' old, when all I kin hit is a pore, helpless hoss." He looked up, sharply. "Whut in tunket? Ain't you never seen blood afore?"

"Ug—uh—" Slim choked, gulped. His face was gray green in the moon glow. "That's—um—that's the—nester. Herb Daley—"

"Mighty nice, son." The old man rubbed his hands together. "Smoking out a double action varmint. Though it's too bad, him having a daughter."

He scrutinized the wagon and the horses. He was saying, "Brands blotted out, so's they kain't be traced. 'Tain't Daley's rig."

Slim went to get his horse. When he returned, he said, "I been thinking mebbe I could go to Paso del Norte and find out who's behind this crooked stuff. It's a cinch Daley ain't the head man, and we didn't ketch no one to question."

"By gravey!" This after a moment of pondering. "That's right. Arter daylight, when I kin study the sign, I'll tell you what size jasper to look fer, and what kind of hosses they was riding."

That would be an open book to an old scout. Slim nodded, then said, "Pappy, why'n't you tell the sheriff and the coroner you done this yourself? Thattaway, won't

nobody suspect me, if anyone hears I'm going to Paso del Norte. Being as these yere are your critters, on your spread, ain't no one going to as much as axe you a cross question."

Old man Crane straightened up. He appreciated modesty in a young squirt. "They allus lowed you was a easy going jasper and none too dang smart, nohow." He slapped his thigh, chuckled. "I allus looked dumb too, when I was your age. Which fooled a lot of folks. You go right now, and I'll write you to Paso del Norte, telling you what all I larned."

That helped. "Good God," the kid told himself, later that night, "I'd ruther be shot than face Madge. And onct I help pappy outen this mess, I ain't never coming back."

Then his face hardened, and looked older, years older, than it had an hour ago. Even if Madge never learned he had fired the fatal shot, she'd still hate him for his father's sake. . . .

ALL the hard cases in the southwest had come to Paso del Norte. Long haired trappers in buckskin, frock coated gamblers, waddies in faded levis, all busy with their own pursuits; and none, as far as Slim Crane could tell, with an eye for him.

As the sun dipped lower, Slim saw the women who had flocked to town. They leaned from windows, beckoning and s m i l i n g; they lounged in doorways, clad only in kimonos whose thin fabric and loosely gathered folds seconded the wearer's brazen invitation.

Somewhere in hell roaring Paso del Norte, Crane expected to get a direct lead to the beef thieves. His father had mailed him descriptions of the fugitives who had survived the melee at the Diamond C. Hoofprints, bits of hair rubbed off on trees, human hair in the sweatband of a hat lost in flight; boot prints, and the length of strides, all these built up the picture. A short, heavy man whose feet were cramped by new, tight boots, had ridden a *grullo;* a long legged, red haired man with a slight limp had escaped on a strawberry roan with one defective shoe.

From one saloon to the next, Slim hunted the pair. Appealing to the law was useless. The beef contractors, the railroad builders, the slaughter house operators were hand in hand. Unless he found overwhelming evidence, he had not a chance.

The only way was to catch the thieves with Diamond C hides in their possession. That would justify cutting them down in their tracks; a frontier jury would acquit him.

"And to hell with the jedge and h i s whereas-nevertheless-buts!" Slim told himself, as back prudently planted against the wall in the corner, his biting glance covered the smoke filled barroom.

One thing Slim had not overlooked; though leaving Arroyo Rojo by night, he could not hope to have reached Paso del Norte unheralded. Two fugitives had ridden ahead of him. Thus, his back was to a wall.

Slim watched the dancers whirling about the rough hewn floor, and the girls who hustled drinks to the tables along the further wall. They

were trim wenches, fresh and shapely; too subtle to wear short skirts. Slim had seen that type in the saloons of Arroyo Rojo, and they seemed downright indecent. But these girls stirred his blood.

Before Slim realized it, he drew a slow, deep breath. The glass in his fingers spilled little drops of whiskey. He shook his head, as if to clear it of dizziness. When a blonde girl with hair that was more silver than yellow came lithely toward him, he could not avoid her glance. Nor did he want to, when he smelled her perfume and heard her voice.

She seemed almost shy, like Madge, the first time they met by moonlight, and she nervously fingered a concha on his vest.

"I wonder if you'd not take a table, over there." She gestured. "We could drink together." She looked up, and hesitancy blossomed into a smile. "Wouldn't it be fun, pretending we're old friends? I'm . . . well . . . a newcomer, and it's awfully hard, playing up to these tough customers. I never realized it would be like this."

A tall man with a drooping black mustache stood in the corner, arms folded. He nodded as he watched her accost Slim. This was the proprietor. The girl flashed him a glance as Slim followed her.

Then he saw a red haired man, long legged and limping a little. Slim remembered his father's description. He wondered if the cowpuncher had a strawberry roan outside.

"Listen, Sally," he whispered, as they approached the table in the corner, "I'm waiting for a fellow, and I can't see much, from here."

A waiter was bringing the drinks Sally had ordered before leaving the bar. One glass, Slim realized, would be cold tea, but he didn't care.

The tall redhead's face went sour, then black when his glance shifted toward Sally. The blonde shrank, caught Slim's arm. Her hip would have brushed him, but for the holster tied to his thigh.

The redhead moved swiftly, despite his game leg. He spat and wrathfully said, "Well, you tow haired tramp, I guess *he's* handsome, huh?"

SLIM did not want to quarrel and make himself conspicuous; his job was to follow the lame man. "Now, look-ee here, pardner." He raised his left hand in a placating gesture; Sally still clung to his right arm. "That ain't no way to talk to a lady."

"Please do go away, Randy," Sally implored.

Between them, they only managed to get him hostile.

"Why, you long legged son of a—!"

The music had stopped, and Randy's voice filled the entire place. Sally cried out, and Slim thrust her away from him. That move was enough to start Randy for his gun.

He was quick, but he delayed a little, to give Slim a chance to get shed of Sally. This was from overconfidence, and the desire to make it clear that he had not drawn first. His face made that all very plain; Slim knew that this man had moved in for a kill.

So did everyone else. Men were

scrambling, and girls were diving for cover.

Randy's eyes suddenly bugged out, and his jaw sagged. That was when Slim snapped, "Drop it, you polecat!"

The gun in his left hand enforced that. Randy, too intent on timing the kid's right hand reach for the holster at his right hip, had missed the Colt which Crane had flashed from the waist band of his pants.

Randy's smoke pole chunked to the sawdust. Men and women began breathing again, murmuring; it seemed almost funny, that surprised gunner's gaping mouth and popping eyes.

But what followed capped a good start. As he holstered his Colt, Slim closed in with his free fist. Randy was cold on his feet, and he had no time to lower his hands to defend himself. He crumpled, cracked his head on a cuspidor, and lay there, not even kicking.

The spectators shook their heads. A bouncer said, "Shucks, Randy won't know his own name fer a couple days." This was as they hauled him to the rear, his scalp deeply gashed.

Slim said to Sally, "M'am, I'm pow'ful sorry, but I can't tarry and drink with you."

He went to the street. A strawberry roan was hitched at the rack. By the saloon lights, he could plainly see the hoof prints: half the near front shoe was missing.

"That gent was fixing to kill me," Slim reasoned, and with certainty. "But ain't nobody around here that's got ground for thinking I know it."

Randy's studied attempt to make Slim draw first indicated that the law was biting into this tough town's hide. Self defense had to be pretty clearly proved. So, as he headed for his hotel, he chuckled and said to himself, "Nothing to do now but see I don't get myself shot in the back. And whilst Mistah Randy is trying to recollect what his right name is, there's a chanct of finding his pardner."

ONCE in his room, he thrust his gun under his pillow, and began unbuckling his spurs. He was thinking, "Mebbe if I fixed myself up like a Mexican, I'd have a better chanct of sneaking up on Randy's pardner."

Winning a few gun fights would not expose the chief of the cattle thieves; that would only block the trail. He sat there, thinking it over; he recollected that Sally knew Randy by name. . . .

A furtive tapping at the door brought him to his feet before he removed his boots. A feminine voice whispered, "It's me. Sally."

He let her in, and replaced his gun when he saw she was alone.

"Oh, I'm in a terrible predicament," she breathlessly began, a hand on his arm.

Sally still wore her blue satin gown. Lamplight reached down into her low cut bodice to model the loveliest curves. A backward move as his boot closed the door behind her. She let go his arm when he offered her the only chair in the room. When he seated himself on the bed, Sally resumed, "I've been robbed—I mean, someone went through my room—over at the Buckhead Saloon—I'd just saved up enough to pay my fare home—"

"M'am, I sure would admire to

help you." Slim was touched by her distress. "But I'm dang nigh busted. If ten bucks'd help—"

"Oh, but it's worse than that!" She buried her face in her hands, and her white shoulders for a moment were shaken by sobs. As Slim seated himself on the arm of the chair and stroked her head, Sally went on, "I married a man—who advertised—he was a wealthy rancher—"

"What? A gal like you, looking for matrumonyal advertising jaspers? That jest ain't reasonable."

"But I lived in Cross Plains. Everyone that amounted to anything left town, except those that got killed in feuds."

He began to catch the point: a lovely girl, one of the many extra women in a town depopulated by adventure and the interminable quarrels of the post oak country, had snapped at the first prospect.

"Uh—what's wrong with your —um . . . mail order husband?"

"He's a drunken bum. He's one-eyed, and positively *filthy!* Most of the time, he's in jail. I told him I'd pay his fine and give him a hundred dollars in cash if he'd promise to leave town and never look at me again!"

Slim, touched to the heart, tried to offer a consoling arm. The chair nearly upset, and in the scramble, Sally ended on his knee. She clung to him, curled up in his arms like a kitten. "Gol dang it, m'am," he gasped, "in another second, I'll be busting right out crying myself. But where in tunket I can get the money—onless mebbe I win myself a reward—" He was thinking fast. "For nailing rustlers or road agents or something."

"Oh, you're wonderful!" Her generous kiss made him realize he had really discovered something. "Slim, if you can just keep an eye on things and protect me until I can save up some more money—"

Sally was built to arouse protective instincts, and her voice encouraged such emotions. That sufficed to start a reckless exchange of kisses; and the fact that her father's thievery and violent death had erected an impassable barrier between Madge and Slim clinched things. . . . He turned the lamp low.

But Slim was surprised when the door slammed open, and Sally screamed, clawed herself out of his arms. "Oh, my God! That's him!"

ONE of the men revealed by the hall light was the proprietor of the Buckhead Saloon. Slim scarcely more than noted his black mustache and twisted mouth and craggy jaw. It was the drunk at the threshold who held his attention.

So this was Sally's husband, strangely released from jail? A chinless, one-eyed beanpole whose weak mouth twitched and slobbered tobacco juice as he screeched, "You dirty—, Sally, you lousy stinking—!"

Sally cried, "Look out, he'll shoot," and flung herself clear across the room, legs for a moment twinkling as she vanished in a flurry of silken slip and streaming blonde hair.

But Slim hardly heard that. A fellow hears nothing when a .45 is weaving into line with his gizzard. The drunk lurched a pace. Slim had no time to debate. His hand came from beneath the pillow. The

drunk was slow and fumbling. Sally's boss made a move toward his hip.

Slim cut loose, and the room shuddered from the rolling blasts of his Colt. The drunk's hammer thumb slipped, and he dropped with a cold gun. Men were tramping and shouting down the hall. They had been attracted by the two who had barged through the lobby, hunting trouble.

Sally's boss did not shoot or even draw. But a deputy marshal was advancing behind drawn guns. Slim knew that that hard bitten specimen would never back down; they'd kill each other.

"Hist 'em, bub!" His icy eyes covered everything; the dead man, the disheveled girl who came from cover, crying out that it was not Slim's fault. "Mebbe 'twarn't his fault, defending hisself," the law allowed. "But smoking out a gent that's pertecting the sanctity of his home is downright murder, m'am, and yo're a disgrace to yore sex, yuh shameless hussy. Mr. Kenyon bails the pore feller outen jail, and look whut you was doing!"

Sally's boss was smiling contentedly, and stroking his mustache. That told Slim a lot. The blonde had not deliberately betrayed him; she had been no more than a cog in the machine. And the marshal was *bona fide;* also he was stubborn in his notions on a husband's rights.

It looked like a hanging. At the very best, more years in the *juzgado* than any man could endure. Sally was paper white, wide eyed; she made inarticulate sounds as she swayed, uncertain on her feet. Slim wondered when she would collapse, or burst out with insane laughter.

The marshal was coming forward, one gun now holstered, so that he could search his prisoner. There was no help for this. Slim saw a man approach Sally's boss, Burt Kenyon.

Kenyon started, cursed, whirled from the scene. That brief distraction left Slim wondering what had happened. A gun blast shook him. Flame from the marshal's Colt set his shirt afire. Glass had spattered. Kerosene fumes thickened the air. The lawman was buckling at the knees.

Slim could not put these details into their natural sequence. Things had happened too quickly, and he was already in motion. Sally was slamming the door, bolting it, screaming, "Run, darling! Before he gets on his feet!"

She had snatched the lamp from its bracket and smashed it across the marshal's head. Slim picked up his gun and bolted for the window. Men were yelling in the hall. Sally cried, "They can't hang me for this! Run, you fool!"

The door was splintering. The bolt was yielding.

SLIM landed in the alley. They could not do much or anything to a woman who had become hysterical. Sally's laughter was clear above the uproar in his room. And before the alarm could spread, he was forking his unsaddled horse.

He was well out of Paso del Norte before a posse combed the town. But Slim Crane's mission was blown all to hell. Whether a warrant would follow him was another question. He'd better talk it

over with his father. That urge drove him toward Arroyo Rojo, the town he had resolved to quit. And quit it he would; he'd get a fresh horse, some money, and his dad's blessing, then head for New Mexico before Madge could ever curse him for being in on her father's death.

As he rode, he wondered what news had startled Burt Kenyon.

Then, hearing hoof beats far behind him, he had no further time for thought. How in tunket could a posse have picked the trail so surely and quickly? With his start, that was all wrong.

Someone might have guessed his next move. Certainly, his identity must have been blazoned all over Paso del Norte.

Slim, however, outwitted his pursuers. His horse, unburdened by a saddle, carried less weight. So he gained for a while, then doubled back; from cover, he watched them swoop past him.

"Dang funny, only four of 'em!" He shook his head, frowned. "And that damn' sure of where I'm going, they ain't bothering to track me!"

He mulled that over. He could not get the full significance. However, his best guess led him toward home, though along a short cut. It was a toss up whether he'd get there before or after the posse. Still, that really made little difference, so that they did not meet.

"Just as long as I can put a bug in pappy's ear. If Kenyon ain't in the beef business, I'm a polecat's uncle!"

When he reached the Diamond C spread, after swinging wide of Arroyo Rojo, it lacked less than an hour of dawn. The cook was not stirring about, nor was anyone snoring in the bunkhouse. Slim guessed that the riders, including his father, were out patrolling the range. That made it bad. He did not know whether to go out to find them, or stay and wait.

A horse whinnied. Even in the gloom, Slim could plainly enough discern the silvery mane and tail of a *palomino* at the hitching post; and the Diamond C had no animal of that coloring in its entire string. Then he noted the glow of light from a side window. Something was dead wrong. Whoever the stranger might be, there should have been some sound of conversation, and dominated by his father's voice.

But Slim's unwary approach had given warning. As a window rattled up, he flung himself from his mount and landed behind the grindstone. A woman cried, "Stay right where you are, or I'll shoot!"

Madge Daley was at the sill, ready to slide to the ground and get to her *palomino;* though only Slim would have recognized her in the shadows that blotted out all but the white blurr of face and throat. It seemed that the desire to escape without recognition had spurred her to that desperate outburst; her voice was tense and tremulous.

She was the last person on earth he wanted to see. He wondered whether, vengeance bent, she had come to assassinate his father. Finally, he contrived to croak, "Madge—what the blazes—what you doing here?"

"Slim!" She choked, and there was a metallic gleam as she low-

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Dig Up the Dead

(Continued from page 17)

Beza avowed. "But thees idea you tell me, she make me geet cold. Anyhow, cold ees better than hot like in hell. We go now?"

THEY went then, and Beza holed up outside of town while Harmony rode on in. Ike Tolt watched him as he dismounted and lounged under a wooden awning. Tolt forgot him, then, figuring he'd told the truth about wanting to cool off on the trail.

Harmony strolled down to the saddle shop, went through the front room and into the rear. The saddler had a pine box resting on a couple of saw horses, and was setting out chairs.

"You can see Oakes' carcass at the inquest when it's cooler," the saddler growled. "Don't lift that lid and let any more heat in on him now."

Harmony shrugged and walked out. He spent a hot hour hanging around. The saddler came out, slammed his door and headed across the street toward the Two-Bit Saloon. Harmony loitered, moved to the corner of the building and made haste toward the rear. He called softly. There was movement in a run of greasewood nearby, and Juan Beza joined him. They crawled in a rear window. . .

When the day's heat was lessening, Adobe's population jammed around the walls of the room in the rear of the saddle shop. Louene Carter came in, refused a chair and stood beside the door. She sought Harmony's eyes, and wondered why he shook his head and smiled.

Hernandez brought in the prisoner. Alamo Carter snorted and glared and, because Harmony didn't look like a real lowdown hairpin, cussed Harmony out for the sake of stubbornness.

Hernandez motioned for Stogie Barr to close the door. He did, and leaned against it, arms dangling at his sides. Hernandez placed a chair facing the men who formed the jury he had gathered—men who figured Carter guilty and would say so and get back to their drinks. It would be off the sheriff's shoulders, then. Maybe Austin would send a Ranger to help him after the inquest verdict?

Hernandez seemed at a loss. He nodded at Harmony, who took the chair. Yes, it was true, he said, Carter had threatened Oakes; yes, he could identify the watch and gun and ring.

He moved back against the wall. Ike Tolt took the chair. Hated to testify against his boss—or ex-boss, now—he declared.

"Hey, wait!" cried Ben Harmony. "Sheriff, this ain't right. I'm supposed to have a look at the corpse. I knew Oakes to see him. But howinell I know that's him in that box?"

"*Si.* I am forget," said Hernandez. He stepped toward the coffin. As he raised the lid, Harmony let his hand rest on his gun. The lid clattered to the floor.

"Dios!" shrieked Hernandez. "This is not Tom Oakes!"

Somebody yelled and kicked back a chair. A drunk gurgled and stiffened out on the floor. Slowly, hideously, the body in the coffin—*sat up!* A bloody bandage around his head, Juan Beza grasped the edge of the pine box. He stared toward Ike Tolt. Tolt, who froze in his chair, breath wheezing in his throat. Tolt, who was seeing a dead man come to life; a dead man he'd buried, and who showed in another dead man's place.

Evening's encroaching gloom shrouded the room. A terrible silence was broken by Ike Tolt's shriek.

"No!" he raged. "I kilt you, buried you! But I never kilt Tom Oakes. I just took the stuff and hid it, after Barr shot Oakes and robbed him. I—"

Hernandez came out of his trance too late. A gun roared, the bullet made a chunky sound, and Ike Tolt went backward in the chair, shrieking as he died.

Harmony was staggered as he drew his gun. Yelling, milling men dove for cover. He fought clear of them, swung around.

Stogie Barr grabbed at Louene Carter, caught her blouse, ripped it half off her as she lunged away from him. Barr pawed, grabbed her again, fingers in the tatters of the blouse. He kicked at the door as he swung her around as a shield.

Harmony knocked a man out of the way and came in. Barr twisted, trying to keep Harmony on his right side. Barr fired a shot from the stingy-gun that had killed Ike Tolt. A man back of Harmony cried and fell. Harmony, still coming in at an angle, felt another shot fan by him, and then the hammer of his gun fell. The muzzle was pressed against Stogie Barr's body and the shot was muffled in his clothes. . . .

ONE arm around Louene Carter's almost nude shoulders, Harmony looked down at Stogie Barr's body huddled on the floor. "Reckon we won't have to prove the border-hoppin', his wet cattle spreadin' disease, his frameup to get Carter out of the way, nor why he kilt Oakes—not now."

He opened the door behind him. "Sheriff, you'll find Oakes' body under that trash over in the far corner. Best let that cantankerous Carter loose so he can take his girl home. An' let Beza explain some things to you."

"I don't want loose until this's explained," Carter yapped. "I won't take Louene home. Yo' take 'er yo'se'f, bigod!"

Harmony helped Louene into the saddle and mounted his own horse. As they turned toward the Carter spread, he chuckled, "I knew the ol' cuss would want just opposite what I said."

Louene nodded. She reined over until their knees touched. Shuddering, she said, "Yes. But the chance you took when you came at Barr!"

"Not too much danger. A gamblin' chance. He toted a left-hand gun, but used his right hand. I figgered him for a stingy-gun, an' kept around where he was in cramped shootin' position."

"You think of everything, don't you?" she snapped.

"Even that I promised to come

back an' take up where we left off," he agreed. "'Course, there ain't no sunshine, but—"

"I tried to hate you for that," she murmured, shivering.

Strong arms lifted her from the saddle, cradled her against a chest not thick enough to conceal a hammering heart. He put his lips to her bare shoulder, raised them to her lips. She sobbed, flung her arms around his neck, crushed her warm, sweet body against him, and gave back that kiss.

Harmony trembled, let the reins drop and the horse stop.

He didn't care. Her kiss, her nearness was enough to make a dead man—and not a fake one like Beza—dig out of his grave. And Ben Harmony wasn't a dead one by a hell of a lot.

Owlhoots of Ghost Creek

(Continued from page 29)

that held Sudden silent most of the way.

All at once it was blazing noon, then the soap root and agave became larger, and a few cedars gave green relief among the fantastically colored rocks.

The girl said, "Who is the woman coming to Crook Elbow to buy this Rancho Estaban? How do you know she is such a fool?"

Sudden grinned and a corner of his mouth drew down.

"Any gal out'n the East with enough dinero to buy a double section o' cow spread has t' be a damn' fool t' be looped in on such a deal. I reckon she's so short on hoss sense she's mebbe figurin' on makin' good range land a dang' dude spread. Her name's Della Courtney."

"I guess I ain't so long on hoss sense myself," smiled Jane Doran, "lettin' you meet up with this gal from the East. But I'll be savin' the powder biscuits, anyway."

Their trail wound into higher rocks. Gnarled oak and walnuts topped both sides of the gap. The trail abruptly widened and water was trickling into a basin spring. Grama grass made a green, inviting spot in the coolness of alligator juniper trees that shaded the basin.

THE girl flattened on her stomach alongside Sudden as they drew cooling water through parched lips. Sudden was watching her alluring face in the mirror of the spring, and he saw her wide eyes turn toward him. He was looking at her rounded throat and the enticing curves in the loosened collar of the wool shirt.

"It's my bounden duty to head off this Della Courtney an' save her dinero, mebbe her life," said Sudden. "But I wisht the gal was in tophet or back in the East, which is all the same thing. I'll be ridin' back to Boot canyon *muy pronto,* Jane Doran."

"An' you'd better be ridin' back, Sudden Cassidy, if you don't want me to be pickin' up your trail with dad's old shotgun," she said with an impish smile.

There was nothing any hombre could have done then but stretch out a lanky arm and pull her close to him. The spring water was cold and her lips were cool and dewy, at first. Then a quiver ran along her body, and without warning her lips were eager and demanding, and his own kiss became savage.

For a long minute or two, Sudden forgot all about the girl from the East, and that it was his duty to be riding. And when he had released her, and they were standing beside the ponies, she said, "I'll be waitin' with dad in his claim cabin two miles up Boot canyon, darling. Sudden, don't let anything happen to you. I wouldn't let you go, but you've said enough for me to know it is the only way to free your conscience."

Sudden watched her ride away, until she was around the first bend in the canyon. His gelding was refreshed and he would ride until night and make camp near the trail, over which the stage ran from Gila to Crook Elbow. And so dazed and completely taken by what was between him and this girl he had known only a few hours, Sudden did not think until quite a while later that it was strange he had not come upon Jane Doran and her dad before this time.

TWO days later, Sudden Cassidy passed but a single hour's time in the sprawling desert town of Crook Elbow. Long enough to learn that Della Courtney had come and gone on the stage to Gila, and that he had ridden in too late to warn her of the treacherous Rust Kinnard and the water baited Rancho Estaban.

Sudden exchanged his desert-worn gelding for a fresh horse. When he rode out again, his lean jaws were hard set and his gray eyes held a new grimness. His canvas bag of water draped from one side of his saddle horn. Another canvas sack jostled his knee on the other side.

Sudden rode light and easy, with due respect for the second canvas sack. He was too late to save Della Courtney by warning her, so he had come to the other way.

"I'll be makin' Ghost Creek 'fore late moonrise t'morrow night," he mused aloud. "An' I'll blow one end o' that creek dam gate to hell an' gone. That'll bust down the rocks so's there won't be no more turnin' the water astray in that side canyon."

Then he mused silently, "An' the next mornin' I'll be eatin' a mess o' powder biscuits in Boot canyon, if I have luck."

The blazing inferno of the desert trail seemed hot enough to melt the two dozen sticks of dynamite riding precariously against the shoulder of the strawberry roan he had bought at Crook Elbow. Sudden relieved his ire over having to ride soft and easy with an occasional oath.

But he reached the lower meadow of the Rancho Estaban within the time he had estimated. The down wind from the canyon brought the smell of greening grama grass and the freshening of newly watered earth. Four days

had been sufficient for the desert sun to do its work with the miracle of water on the fertile soil.

"So the Courtney gal's here," said Sudden through clenched teeth. "An' she wouldn't be knowin' about the dead cows they've dragged off, or the graves o' Mary an' Joe Harden. Well, this time Ghost Creek'll lose its rightful claim t' the name. An' then I'm ridin' into Gila. It'll be Rust Kinnard or me, an' I ain't goin' to Jane Doran no other way."

The moon had not yet softened the star brightness of the desert sky in the East. But the starlight outlined the hacienda, the circular ocotillo fence and the pole corral inside it. It was the sudden nickering of a horse that caused Sudden to pull up his roan. He rein-checked his own cayuse's whinnying reply to the horse near the corral.

Then Sudden was studying the shadowed bulk of the rambling white ranch house. His gaze went instinctively to the wide window through which he had seen Joe Harden wound Rust Kinnard to save Mary from his beastly intention. There was no light there now, and no light anywhere in the house.

Sudden was wondering if this newcomer, Della Courtney, would have taken the bedroom that Mary Harden had furnished with her own woman things? And Sudden became rigid, every nerve going tense, for the low mutter of voices floated out. One was that of a man and the other was that of a woman.

IT STRUCK Sudden that what had happened behind that window only a few nights before could hardly be repeated, at least not so soon. But he slipped from the roan, ground looping the reins. Before he started toward the gate in the ocotillo fence, he carefully removed the sack of dynamite, against the possibility of his horse being scared. Walking with a slow crouch, he reached the ocotillo gate, and he laid the sack under the woven thorns at one end.

Again horses were tied to the corral poles, all saddled. There were half a dozen this time, and Sudden didn't have to guess twice to realize that Rust Kinnard once more was a visitor. But Sudden was in a puzzled state.

Without light in the bedroom, the hombre in there was talking and a girl was replying. Sudden could not catch the words. He was thinking he had been a locoed damn' fool! Riding all the way to Crook Elbow to warn Della Courtney!

"Damn 'er!" he gritted. "An' she's turned out to be that kind of a woman critter! Rust Kinnard's own stripe, bigod! An' me fixin' t' blow the hell out'n that Ghost Creek gate! Well, that's out now, but there's another score's got t' be settled, an' woman or no, yuh'll be heatin' yore irons, Kinnard."

Sudden could see the rancho bunkhouse, outside the ocotillo fence and across a shallow draw. There was no light there either, but some sleeper turned and an old woven rope bunk creaked. Sudden judged that Kinnard's outlaws probably had drunk themselves stupid and rolled in as they were, without troubling to unsaddle their horses.

Sudden eased both six-guns in their leathers and made sure sand of the desert ride had not checked the smoothness that would make for a fast draw. He saw that his roan was quietly cropping tender new grass where he had left him.

Sudden refrained from stepping on the wide porch, fearing a board would creak. So he was the breadth of the porch from the bedroom window when he came opposite it. For the first time, the low words of Kinnard and the girl came to him.

Then it was that Sudden's bitter anger was replaced by an astounding revelation. For he heard the girl's voice, tense and low, although it was muffled inside the room.

"You'll drop that match, Kinnard," she was saying. "You'll wait to light your quirly until he gets back. As long as your filthy owlhoots believe you're having no trouble with me, as you thought you would, there'll be no trouble. But maybe you've got a hombre watching, and if he sees you sittin' against that window like that, he'll know it isn't natural for you."

"Damn yuh!" grated Rust Kinnard's voice. "Yuh ain't got no more guts to shoot than any other woman! Gov'ment or no gov'ment rights, yuh'll be findin' that yore smart eastern trick o' filin' on Ghost Creek to its source ain't gittin' yuh nothin'! If'n yuh show sense, Della Courtney, you an' me'd be a great team hitched! Thisaway, s'pose yuh do hold the Rancho Estaban? What'll that be stacked up with all the ranges around Gila you an' me could be ownin'?"

Sudden Cassidy was holding his breath, listening, watching the dark bunkhouse. He wasn't slow thinking, but it took a little time for what he had heard to percolate through his dazed brain.

"By jehosiphat!" he whispered hoarsely. "An' I went ridin' all the way t' Crook Elbow t' warn a gal with that kind o' hoss sense! She's gov'ment filed on Ghost Creek! But hell! How'll she be holdin' them water rights 'thout no law in the county but Rust Kinnard hisself?"

THEN he recalled swiftly that she had mentioned someone who was coming back. Then the Eastern gal must have some smart hombre along with her, and Rust Kinnard had arrived unexpectedly while he was away. The way Sudden got it, the Courtney filly must have got the drop on Kinnard and now she had him sitting outlined against a window opening onto the patio. And if she was that smart, maybe she'd also taken his guns!

The girl was talking, her voice too low for him to catch the words. And Kinnard rapped out, "Bigod! Thar ain't any one hombre ever gittin' away with it, even so I did wait fer him, which I ain't—"

Sudden's hand gripped the walnut stock of a six-gun, for that abrupt outburst in a loud voice had a meaning, and the girl should have been warned. For in the middle of what he was saying, Kinnard must have dived from his chair in the darkness.

"Whoom!" It was the loud, resounding explosion of a six-gun in the room, and Sudden knew the girl had fired, and also that she had been tricked by Kinnard lunging

away from the window under cover of his own palaver.

There was but the one crashing shot, a slapping blow that followed and a hoarse cry from the girl that was abruptly choked off.

"Yuh pizen hellion!" roared Kinnard. "I'll l'arn yuh who's boss o' Ghost Creek, you an' that leather-faced rat! Thunk yuh could run a ranny on Rust Kinnard, huh?"

Sudden was leaping onto the porch as he heard the tearing of cloth and again Kinnard's hate-filled voice.

"Bigod! I'll beat the livin' lights out of yuh, an' I'll throw yuh t' the boys! But first I'll—"

Sudden was by the window now, pausing to make out the figure of Kinnard. Even in the darkness, the body of the girl showed where Kinnard had pinned her against the wall. And the girl cried out in a strangled voice, with her throat under Kinnard's brutal fingers.

And the name she called upon sent tingling madness like molten fire along Sudden's veins. For she cried, "Sudden—Sudden! Oh, God help me!"

He knew then that the girl was Jane Doran and as Kinnard cursed and choked off her despairing appeal, Sudden was on the point of heaving himself through the window.

A smashing blow of a gun butt or some other hard weapon took him between the ears. He had failed to see the lanky, fast moving figure come around the corner of the hacienda and hurtle upon him with the speed of a cougar striking.

Sudden's face banged on the planks of the porch and he thought his skull had been split wide open. He was conscious of dizzying pain, but sprawled helplessly, his six-gun lying within inches of his hand. And he could not for the moment use his hand to reach it.

Yet his senses were somehow acute enough to hear the girl's cry converted into a low moaning. The hombre who had knocked him down did not pause, but was darting along the porch toward a door. And then a burst of oaths and a fury of crunching blows came from inside the room.

SUDDEN'S fogged brain gathered then that the hombre the girl had expected was the one who had mistaken him for one of Kinnard's owlhoots at the window and had smashed him out of the way. The slugging blows were continuing inside the room. A hard, dry voice crackled.

"I'd oughta slit yuh wide open for bein' a skunk, Kinnard, but the law's the law, an' I'm sworn to uphold it! So—"

Another crunching blow, and the thudding of one man to the floor, and Kinnard's profane yell, "Yuh damn' sneakin' tin star! I'll finish yuh! I'll take the gal an'—"

Strength was coming back to Sudden's numbed spine. His reaching hand went to the six-gun that had fallen to the porch. And as he touched it, he heard the groan of the hombre who had attempted to take Kinnard.

Feet thudded outside the ocotillo fence. The bobbing heads of owlhoots showed where they were running from the bunkhouse, aroused by the girl's single shot and the racket of the fight in the house. Kinnard's gloating voice was still heaping abuse upon the hombre he

had apparently bested and Sudden listened for the girl's voice, but she was silent.

The bulky figure of the hawk-nosed Kinnard showed in the window above Sudden, but it was evident the owlhoot leader did not see him in the darkness close to the porch floor.

"Git yore hosses!" yelled Kinnard. "We're ridin'! We're takin' the gal an' this gov'ment lawman up the canyon! When we're done with the gal—"

Ribald whoops burst from the throats of the owlhoots. The long gate in the ocotillo fence started to open. Sudden Cassidy had the edge of his hand steady on the porch floor, and his fingers wrapped about the butt of his six-gun.

He aimed and triggered deliberately, although he was fully aware he was inviting a slug from Kinnard that might split his spine. His iron whammed, and he sent all five bullets smoking as fast as he could thumb the hammer, aiming at the dynamite sack in the darkness.

It might have been the fourth or the fifth bullet that found its mark by the end of the ocotillo gate. Sudden could not be sure, for the ground rocked and the air was split by a breath-taking explosion. A whooming mushroom of flame and smoke enveloped the gate through which Kinnard's owlhoots were crowding. There was not a cry nor was there a scream.

There was nothing then but the rolling echo of the explosion being hurled back from the hogback range and the canyon above Rancho Estaban. In this, Sudden did not hear the double crack of the six-gun in Kinnard's hand above him. For Sudden was rolling, hitting the hacienda wall and dragging his other six-gun with his left hand.

One of Kinnard's slugs pounded into Sudden's back somewhere, for his backbone seemed to turn cold and he was instantly very sick. He could just see Kinnard's head above the blaze of his gun, and he could do no other then than employ what strength remained to shoot him cold.

The iron ceased flaming down at him, and Rust Kinnard draped himself over the window sill like some sawdust dummy.

SUDDEN felt a warm, compelling kiss that would have brought a corpse to life, and he was far from being dead. A dry, hard voice said, "For law sakes, Jane, git yoreself some more clothes on 'fore yuh have that fightin' hombre plumb awake an' seein' yuh lookin' plumb scand'lous. I mistook 'im for one o' them owlhoots an' his hard skull saved 'im. He's got a slug-busted rib an' it ain't nowise fatal. If'n he does open his eyes an' sees yuh like that, it'll more'n likely kill 'im."

Sudden opened his eyes to cautious slits, and it didn't kill him. His arms went around Jane so suddenly she gasped, but he tightened his grip and he said, "Yuh turned out to be one damn' sweet liar, an' yuh sent me high-tailin' after a Della Courtney that I'm bettin' don't exist, but I come ridin' back jest in time—"

"Please, Sudden," she said, but he still held her and a tall old man with a leathery, wrinkled face and friendly eyes chuckled and put a

cover off the bed around her shoulders. "I'm all the Della Courtney there is," she went on. "I'm Jane Doran and this is my dad, Jim, the new government deputy marshal. I let you ride away, 'cause I didn't want you to get yourself gunned, and dad and me had figured our play to bust up Rust Kinnard's Ghost Creek swindle."

"So yuh filed on Ghost Creek water rights, an' yore dad is the law t' see yuh hold the same," groaned Sudden. "An' yuh're rich or yuh couldn't-a bought the Rancho Estaban, an' I've been an owlhoot that ain't fitten t' be hung. If yore dad's the law marshal, it's his duty to be arrestin' me fer my share in Kinnard's crookedness. But if'n he lets me, I'll ride to new parts as soon—"

The old man's voice cracked with sternness.

"I ain't lettin' yuh escape that easy, son! Reckon yo're in my custody, an' Jane's goin' t' be needin' a rodder for this Estaban rancho 'mighty bad! Yuh'll be ridin' straight an' lawful, or by gum, I'll put yuh in the calaboose fer the rest o' yore nacheral life!"

"And I make the swellest powder biscuits you ever tasted, honey," murmured Jane Doran. "And besides cooking, I—"

His lead busted rib hurt like blazes, but Sudden grinned.

"I savvy," he said. "An' I'm takin' the job permanent."

Tonic For a Terror

(Continued from page 71)

and how he'd fooled himself.

"You own this place, huh?" he called to the girl.

"No. It belongs to a friend of mine. I had business in Tule for a few days. Important business. I just borrowed the cottage."

She came out. Her hair was combed, and she wore a simple divided skirt and trim riding boots. Her close-clinging silk blouse was open at the throat. Fresh, desirable as hell, Teton thought, aching to kiss her again.

He wondered who she was, where she'd come from and all. And he also wanted to know about his black eye and Queen Saphronia. The girl refused to answer his questions.

"You may have one small drink," she told him. "I'll trust you for that. No, I won't mark the bottle you'll find in the kitchen, so if you aren't trustworthy and take a big one, you won't have to hide the fact by running water in the bottle."

"I—Seems nice, hearin' *you* tell me what to do." He grinned sheepishly. "Where you goin'?"

"I'm going to get something for our breakfast. I'll be right back."

He watched her go down a trail toward the town.

"The hell with Maureen Dell,"

he grunted. "I'll never marry nobody but that girl there!"

He wondered why in hell it took a woman so long to buy a few vittles. He didn't know the girl had a few other errands to do before she returned. But she did return, holding her face very straight. He announced proudly he hadn't had a drink.

"I'll answer a few questions as a reward," she smiled, sitting down opposite him, their knees touching under the table.

"Better, I'll tell you what you're going to ask. You got drunk. You took up with a girl in the Hava Snort. She likely doped your liquor. You stumbled out, drunkenly telling the world what you thought of Maureen Dell.

"It was dark. Yet you saw Miss Nellie Trask's wax dummy in her window, kicked in the plate glass and dragged the dummy out. A couple of men came up. There was a battle. You were hit on the head and in the eye."

"Them was likely skunks workin' for this Kane Drago. You wait'll I meet *that* son!" Teton growled.

"Anyhow, I was nearby. I knew you, by description, and hearing of you. I stopped Nellie Trask's screaming, the two men disappeared, and I brought you here. I was taking care of you. Uh, for Maureen Dell."

"Useta make me pizen mad when that bran-faced skinny girl runt bawled about me ridin' salty hosses," Teton said. "I like it, you takin' a lookout for me. But why'd you have to 'Do it for Maureen Dell?' Darn her!"

THE girl smiled. Man, she was pretty as a spotted pinto, sitting there across the table from a Teton O'Day who'd begun to see the error of his ways.

"I got you home, here, but you insisted on bringing that wax dummy along. You kept calling it Maureen Dell, and then you'd cuss and call the dummy a liar, because it was too good looking to be Miss Dell. I rolled you in bed. You refused to take off your hat or spurs. You couldn't, I mean, and wouldn't let me. So I put you in as was, with Queen Saphronia.

"When you came falling out of the bedroom this morning, and I learned you thought you'd *killed* a woman—" the girl laughed and wiped tears out of her eyes—"I seized the chance to throw a scare into you, and made up the story I told you about your coming here.

"You were man enough, though," the girl fell serious, "to refuse to hide your trouble. You meant to face the music—not like a swaggering hero, but a real, sound man."

She rose from the table.

"You'd better go on down and face Nellie Trask and settle for her window and Queen Saphronia."

"I'll do that. I'll see the lawyer, Asia Rayne, too, an' get things settled on that Dell score. An' then I'm lookin' up Kane Drago an' that dancehall gal. Wait'll I get done with Drago!"

"Trouble-maker. Bad man!" the girl snorted. "Well, go ahead. Maybe Kane Drago will make you wish you'd never hatched."

"I'm sorry. I never meant it that way. I just want to—"

"Start trouble." She appeared very angry. "Go ahead. Take the bit in your teeth, Teton the Terror, and get your ears whipped down."

"They'll be stickin' straight up when I come back to you," he promised, striding out.

He paused and swallowed hard when he reached the Tule Millinery and Dress Emporium. The broken window leered at him and broken glass crunched under his boot soles.

"You!" a shrill, shrewish woman with a face like a busted tomahawk screeched at him. She came out of the emporium like a magpie and landed all over him.

"You'll pay for Saphronia. You'll get me another one from Denver." She slapped at him and kicked his shins. Folks were sticking their heads out doors and windows and shame heated Teton O'Day from head to foot and his face became red as his hair. Somebody snickered, somebody whooped encouragement and called, "Ride 'im. Ride the big terror, Nellie."

Teton spun, fists balled. He'd get that son, whoever. He came up short. A stocky man with a town marshal's badge on his vest blocked his path.

"Whoa!" he rapped, the command a little mushy sounding. The marshal had receipted for a lam on the lips and they were swollen and sore. He limped back a step and dragged out a gun.

"You don't remember me, I reckon; but I know about you," he growled. "Nellie, stop that chatterin'! I'm takin' this wild one to the Justice o' Peace now. He'll get all that's comin' to him!"

"Sacred Hades, I'm glad to get away from *her,*" Teton panted. He looked back at the marshal. "I ain't no dangerous criminal. Get the damn pistol outta my backbone."

"You're dangerous unless you got a strong hand over you," the marshal spat. "Never mind them lookin' out at you. Move. A swellheaded no-account like you needs a tonic. Bullets make a good tonic for terrors, don't you forget."

They walked on. The marshal dug him with the gun muzzle and "Whoaed" him again.

THE doors of the Hava Snort Saloon opened. A tall, serious faced man pushed a woman out before him and into a spring wagon a man had stopped in the street.

"She ain't got time to wait for a train," the man called to the marshal. "She's leaving now."

Teton stared at the girl. Hell, it was Cora Nance, the dancehall girl! He remembered the pressure of her curved figure, the fire of her kisses, the way she filled his arms as she sat on his lap and held drinks to his lips yesterday. It had seemed good, had seemed like another easy conquest for a hero and terror. But that—was yesterday!

The girl didn't see him. She was cussing the tall man in assorted tones and vivid words. The driver started abruptly, smacked her down onto the board seat and jolted her parting blast out of her.

"She's a hellion, Drago," the marshal allowed.

The tall man faced them. His nose was puffy, one side of his face was scratched. He nodded and sighed. Didn't seem like a bad

man, this Kane Drago. Still, looks were deceiving.

Teton forgot the marshal and his gun. He lunged at Drago, swinging a hungry fist.

"Whap!"

Teton groaned and covered his head with his arms.

"Had to wallop you twicet, now," the marshal complained. "Bigod, you be good, an' get goin'. Reckon you know which way. Lawyer Raynes is the Jay Pee here now."

"You wait, bigod. I see it. It's a frame up. You got that girl out of town because you was afraid she'd tell she was fixin' me for a killin' or somethin'," Teton snarled at Drago.

"Friend O'Day, I ought to fix your nose like you fixed mine," Drago grunted, and fell back to walk beside the marshal.

Teton frowned. What'd it mean? The marshal said he'd had to hit Teton *twice* on the head. Drago said Teton had puffed up his nose. By hell and sacred Hades, it was the marshal and Drago who'd roughed him last night!

"Rayne - in - the - face," Teton barked, stepping into Asia Rayne's office. Raynes was one he remembered, anyhow. "This loco marshal an' this Drago are connivin' to—"

"Shut up and take off your hat and sit down!" Rayne snapped. "Marshal, what is the charge against this man?"

"I'll clean up this dump an' ever'body in 'er!" Teton barked. He started to rise, and subsided when the marshal raised the barrel of his gun suggestively.

"You're all framin' against me!" Teton growled.

"You're framing against yourself," Rayne snapped. "I fine you two months in jail, contempt of Court. The charges?

"Hmmn . . . Resisting an officer . . . assault on an officer and a citizen, Kane Drago . . . Disorderly conduct in the Hava Snort . . . breaking and entering private property and stealing a wax dummy—" Rayne smiled to himself when he mentioned this.

HE LOOKED severely over his spectacles at Teton. "I'll maybe sentence you to a year. Maybe more. You ought to get life!

"Damn it, Teton, why didn't you come back here, after your paw died, and stop your foolishness? Huh—not you. You come back after writing me a lot of sass about a fine girl. You get drunk. Raise hell.

"Cora Nance, Teton. Stop muttering and listen! She got a job a week ago. It seems like somebody learned you were coming here, and sent her. Drago got it out of her last night. She had you in her room, filling you with doped liquor when he learned of you and her and went upstairs.

"You ponked him on the snoot and after falling downstairs, you wabbled outside. Drago found out the girl was working for the land company that's trying to get the O'Day range and the lake water rights that goes with it. He chased her out, as you saw awhile ago. That company sent her to wreck you here, or sign away your part of the O'Day ranch, which would mean complete loss of the place to them eventually. And the place

could be pulled from under the notes owing if you'd pitch in."

"Yah!" Teton jeered. "Where does this Drago come in?"

"I own the place next to yours," Drago explained. "As well as the Hava Snort and the feed store. I'm merely a business man who came here for his health. It wouldn't be healthy for us if that big land syndicate got a foothold. They'd bring in a flock of hoemen, they'd grab water rights. They'd ruin a good cattle range, and good cow town for all of us. That's why I'm interested, damn your onery hide!"

He said this last without animosity.

Asia Rayne hunched in his chair. The marshal spoke:

"After you got away from Drago, you kicked in Nellie Trask's window. It was Nellie blacked your eye—with a rock. I had to bonk you on the head to stop you when you busted my mouth an' kicked my shins.

"It was—"

Rayne frowned at the marshal.

"The girl who's stayin' in the cottage on the slope," the marshal finished, "who quieted you. Even then we had to let you lug that damn dummy to get you to quiet."

"Why in hell didn't that girl tell me?" Teton rapped. He was ashamed as he faced the marshal and Kane Drago. She, the girl had *said* he'd get his ears whipped down!

"What about the ranch, an' this Maureen Dell," Teton inquired.

"Terms of your father's will said you'd have to come back, like I wrote you. That you'd take orders from Miss Dell, as to drinking, or not drinking, and fighting and such. If you do this for a year, and really work, the O'Day ranch will pull out and you'll get a third; the girl two thirds. If you marry her, which is your father's expressed wish, naturally—"

"Then I get a third!" Teton bawled. He was on his feet pounding Rayne's desk. "I'll go out an' drink. I'll pick me a fight, mebbe. Just to show you I ain't marryin' that woman.

"Why, to hell with the third of the ranch! I'll pull it through an' to hell with that hoggin' land syndicate an' all. The Dell heifer can have it all. I'll work an' get me a place. Because there's only one girl I'd marry, ever. They's only one girl I'd take a order from."

He stopped, panting and glaring defiantly.

RAYNE nodded. Drago and the marshal exchanged quick looks.

"Yes," Rayne said. "We saw that girl this morning. She talked to us when she came down to the store. That's why the marshal was waiting around Nellie Trask's. This all was, well, sort of figured ahead of time, you see."

"What's that girl tryin' to do?" Teton howled. "Marry me to Maureen Dell? Bigod—"

"Stop swearing in Court! I wouldn't be surprised if that is the object, Teton. Maureen Dell always looked up to you, feared for you, loved you as a kid."

"I *won't marry her!*" Teton yelled, almost hopping up and down. "I'll only marry—"

A door opened and the girl from the cottage came in from the rear. Teton's eyes—*eye,* rather—opened wide.

"Marry her," he finished. He sat down and stared. What was it about her made him wonder? What made her seem so near?

"It's kind of you," the girl told him politely. "But I have something to say about that. You are in a position to tell every girl you will or will not marry her—without asking her wishes at all?"

Teton looked at the floor. "No'm," he mumbled. "I reckon that's another idea took out of me. But, gosh!" He stepped over and grabbed her hands. "Please. I'll let you name the trail an' I'll ride it as long as I ride it with you."

She lowered long lashes over shining eyes.

"I'll ride the river with you any time, Teton," she said. "Even if you do contradict yourself terribly. I've always loved you, always cried over you and your hurts. Have I changed so much—dear?"

"Muh-my ears are p l u m b down!" gasped Teton O'Day. "But how could a freckled, skinny kid grow up to be as pretty an' sweet as you are now? Maureen. Maureen Dell! Come here!"

Her lips were yielding to his, and all the love this budding young woman knew made her tremble against Teton O'Day. He felt humbled, awed, and the pugnacious past was something he wanted very much to forget. They clung. He forgot about Queen Saphronia —though later he would chuck her remains out a window because three is a crowd. He forgot Drago and the others.

It was Maureen who drew back, blushing. "Hummmuph!" Drago said. "It seems like our range is safe."

"I could dig up the County Clerk," the marshal suggested.

"And with the license thereby cared for, may I remind you I perform marriages?" Asia Rayne said. He rapped with his fist. "Court to order! For all those charges, Teton, I sentence you to life."

Teton O'Day grabbed Maureen again and started his term right then and there.

NEXT MONTH—

Hell on the Rockers

by

Laurence Donovan

Six Gun Nurse

(Continued from page 65)

round of her chin. She didn't even cry out as her head snapped back. If Steve was any judge of a knockout punch, Marilyn Lee was off his hands and safe for some time to come.

Steve broke his guns and refilled the cylinders. Brand Lorton and his hombres had spread out. Steve swore a hard oath as he realized he was almost helpless against the fan-shaped movement of the raiders who were now already crossing into the black and invisible yard around the hacienda.

Steve lifted an iron, thinking the blast of a gun might serve as a warning to Jane Tobe in the hacienda. But his finger refused to trigger the shot. Warning would do little good, if it brought a rush of encircling killers upon him in the darkness. He was but one against anywhere from possibly six to a dozen hombres who wouldn't hesitate to feed him lead.

SOME way he had to cut through the line of the Lorton raiders and get into the ranch house. He went over the low fence, listening to the rustling movement of Lorton's men. For the minute he was safe enough, seeing they believed him to be riding with the other waddies in pursuit of the decoy gun slick called Buck.

If there was only some way he could be the first into the hacienda and start the gunplay? He had the grimly ironical thought that maybe the prim Jane Tobe, who had been quick enough on the trigger to save his life, might back him up in a showdown ruckus?

A vision of her face as he had last seen it under the yellow lamplight flashed into mind. Hell! It made him a little sick, thinking how easily the other little nurse had put her loop onto him.

Now he was halfway between the fence and the low window into the long room, crawling flat on his stomach, and watching two other figures close by moving with crouching quickness. Lamplight still streamed through the lower window nearest him. He could have gunned either or both of the nearest raiders, but it would have left him open to every other gun.

As a last resort, he might have to do that and make a dash for it. He wondered if the strange Jane Tobe could possibly have any idea of what was happening? Then he knew she had not.

Two things happened with dazing suddenness.

Jane Tobe's tall figure was outlined in the lamplight at the low window. Low, growled oaths filtered to Steve's ears from close by. Lorton's men had seen her.

There came a whooshing, oily explosion from the bunkhouse. Quick, billowing flame shot from the doorway. The bunkhouse oil lamp had been smashed and its blaze would quickly make a bonfire of the dried slab shack.

Then Steve saw Jane Tobe stiffen and her hands came into view.

Steve gulped back an oath. The amazing nurse was gripping two .45s, and she was coming through the window. Her eyes were on the bunkhouse and Steve knew he had to stop her.

"Git back, Miss Tobe! Git down! Yo're in a loop!"

Steve's yelled warning burst upon the creeping raiders. It had the effect of bringing the two hombres nearest him to their feet, their irons sending slices of deadly blue fire in the direction of his voice as they triggered from hip level.

Steve wasted no time on his triggers. His calloused thumbs rippled along both gun hammers. One hombre uttered an "Aw-rr-k!" He went over from his heels, trying to swallow blood where a slug went through his throat.

The other shooting hombre whirled half around as a .45 bullet smashed into his shoulder bones, but one of his guns kept on whamming. Steve was collecting lead in more than one place, and slugs made funny numbing sensations around his lean thighs and his ribs.

But none had yet been fatal, and he darted toward the window and Jane Tobe. He heard her cry out, "Steve—Steve Bradley! Get down out of line! Drop, Steve!"

He guessed she must be scared plumb crazy. He heard Lorton's chiseling voice ring out across the hacienda yard.

"Rush the house! Git that lamp, muy pronto!"

"The lamp, Jane Tobe! The lamp!" That was Steve's own warning as he hit the ground under the window.

His cry was too late. Brrang! The long room lamp crashed. There was an instant licking tongue of fire running along the spilled kerosene. Lorton's voice whooped out, "Up them stairs! The damn' hellion went up thar! Git 'er an' see't she don't git Tolbert out!"

Steve saw he had been given a few seconds time by Lorton having spread his raiders around the house. Steve made the window ledge and rolled inside the room. Flame was spreading along the kerosene and it was too late to stop it.

Six-guns *brranged* from two sides, the bullets thudding into the wall and floor. Steve picked out what looked like a possible place to make a stand in the darkness beside the heavily built stairs. He jumped from his toes, hit the floor rolling and made the corner just as a slug numbed his right leg completely.

He saw Lorton's men, four or five figures, make a massed rush across the blazing room toward the stairs. He got up his guns and one hombre went down, his clothes firing from the oil. Then both hammers clinked with sickening emphasis. His guns were empty.

"It's Steve Bradley!" bellowed Brand Lorton. "Git him cold! Damn' him, he'll pay up at last fer the years he's fought—"

Lorton's own iron was leveled and the leaping fire caught Steve in its light and made him a wide open target. He stood up, hurling one empty gun at Lorton's head and missing.

Lorton gave a hard, gloating laugh. Steve saw his thumb slowly cocking the hammer of his gun. And—

From over beyond the stairs, from an alcove behind a carved oak table, two six-guns started singing the fastest song that Steve had ever heard. He could just see two long-fingered white hands and two thumbs that seemed to be playing a rat-a-tat-tat across bright steel gnurls of the hammers.

From Brand Lorton's lips burst an agonized, screaming oath. His six-gun flamed, but its bullets went wild, for Lorton's eyes were already glazing in death. Two of four gunnies beside him were down beside their boss, drilled so plumb mortal that neither one moved after he fell. The remaining pair escaped long enough to drop, get up their guns and start lead pounding into the oak table protecting the figure of the amazing Jane Tobe.

THE two gunnies were shielded from the nurse's line of fire for a few seconds, then Steve saw her head appear, the yellow hair streaming about her set, white face. And even as her two guns spouted blobs of yellow flame, Steve realized it hadn't been the lamplight that had made hers the prettiest face he had ever seen.

But as the gun slinging nurse exchanged shot for shot with the hombres on the floor, Steve saw the oil flame suddenly shoot along a hanging drape and send a band of fire across the head of the single stairway.

His numbed leg handicapped him, but the quick thought of the sick owner, Tolbert, trapped in his bed poured strength through his muscles. He was scarcely conscious of Jane Tobe's voice crying out at him.

"Steve! Steve! No—no! Don't —"

For he was already halfway up the stairs, and he turned only his eyes, for he had seen that the last of Lorton's gun slick riders were finished. And then he didn't see Jane Tobe at all and he thought she might be coming around the fire, now half filling the long room, to follow him up the stairs.

The blaze ahead of him was still thin, licking along the boards toward the door of the sickroom where Tolbert had remained under the care of his two nurses. Smoke rolled up in choking density as Steve reached the door.

Because of his numbed and weakened leg, Steve fell and rolled on the floor inside the bedroom. And the voice of Chung Wu cried out in alarm.

"Missee Tobee say no comee boss's loom! Allee—"

The Chinese cook saw then the intruder was Steve. For he ran to him and gabbled, "Stevee Bladlee! You shot bad mebbe so?"

Steve was shot bad enough in places to feel his brain whirling into a fog. But he didn't pass out until his fading vision had taken in every item of the sickroom that had housed J. N. Tolbert.

Steve saw two single beds covered with clean white spreads, and neither was occupied. The delicate scent of perfume filled the room. The one dresser contained nothing but those things which go with a woman critter.

Steve heard the door open and Chung Wu squawking.

"Fire! Fire! Comee up stairs

allee over! No can get—"

It didn't seem to matter a damn to Steve if hell-fire itself was cutting off the stairs. The strain of his wounds snapped the last shred of resistance in his brain. A white face framed by cascading yellow hair swam in front of his eyes, moved away, came closer. He didn't see it any more.

BUT the white, clear-cut, beautiful face again swam into view. Only the flowing yellow hair touched his own face this time. Warm, soft lips were upon his own. They were lifted and a clear, musical voice murmured.

"You'll never forgive me when you know, Steve Bradley—you'll find out how I tricked you into believing the Tilt-6 had a sick owner —because I never wanted it known I was the one they called—"

Steve opened his eyes and he was looking into wide blue ones that held tears. Jane Tobe's mouth was no longer prim, for it curved temptingly close. The flat, drab waist had been torn away and the rounded whiteness of smooth shoulders was graduated into a full and luscious bosom.

Steve's brain and muscles seemed to act without any thinking on his part. He was lying on the smooth lawn of the still blazing hacienda, and he could hear the shouts of Tilt-6 waddies who were running buckets of water from the outside well. They were getting the fire under control, saving the ranch house, although the bunkhouse was already burned.

Steve's arms lifted and went around the shoulders of Jane Tobe. She breathed, "Oh, thank God!" But for a second or so she seemed to resist his arms, and then—

She was beside him, her lips pressed upon his mouth. He was conscious that she must have stripped off that ungodly cloth skirt, perhaps because it had hampered her in the gun fighting action or when, as he was to learn, she had climbed the porch and helped Chung Wu bring him from the sickroom that had never had a patient.

And with that cloth skirt missing, and only the thinnest and briefest of silken slips remaining, Steve realized he had misnamed the prim nurse when he had called her "slab-sided" and "long-geared."

She surrendered to his arms for the briefest minute, and every yielding contour of the perfect body responded to the long kiss he gave her. Then she pulled away from his arms, her voice low and desperate.

"When you know, Steve Bradley—it won't make any difference that I loved you after the first few days—Steve, listen! Down Hermosillo way they knew me as 'Trigger Jane.' I had to sing down there, or starve. You would know, Steve, how it is. Anyway, I was born on the Colorado range and my dad taught me to shoot before I grew up. So it was quick guns in Hermosillo or quit singing, and I kept on singing.

"I never killed an hombre until tonight, but I taught several to respect my word. An uncle left me some money and I bought up John Harney's notes on the Tilt-6. I wanted it forgotten who I was, and I didn't want gun trouble with any-

body that would bring out the truth. So Marilyn Lee and I thought up J. N. Tolbert and then—"

"And now, yuh mean, Jane Tobe," said Steve, one hard hand over her quivering mouth. "And now it don't make no damn' diff'runce, an' they ain't no call to be traducin' the gal I've made up my mind sudden like is bein' takin' on as my perm'nent lady boss. Even if I once said I was resignin' an' lightin' my shuck for other parts. I'm—"

"Steve, honey—" And that was lost in a kiss that brought a sudden hard chuckle into a nearby throat.

Grit Harden was standing there, and he had an Indian blanket draped around the intriguing figure of Marilyn Lee.

"Yo're the dangedest liar, Steve!" grinned Grit. "I said yuh'd keep on ramroddin' the Tilt-6 in spite o' hell an' lady bosses! I'm thinkin' mebbe so, Steve, when yuh git yore pins under yuh, we kin ride down tuh the county seat and make it a double hitch?"

Steve Bradley looked into the dark eyes of Marilyn Lee. There was a funny, little quirk at the corners of the little nurse's sweet mouth, as she looked long and steadily at Steve. Steve's throat suddenly went dry.

There was a blue bruise across the little nurse's rounded chin.

"If yuh want it that way, Grit," said Steve as steadily as he could. "I was thinkin' maybe now we'd be addin' the late Brand Lorton's Star-B tuh the Tilt-6 with them savin's o' ours. Nothin' like havin' neighbors yuh kin trust."

Marilyn Lee's dark eyes sparkled and she gave Steve a little smile.

You Can't Fight a Woman

(Continued from page 81)

ered a pistol. "Good God, I thought —I've got to get out of here before your father gets back—don't ever tell anyone—dad would kill me!"

She was scarcely coherent. Slim vaulted to the sill. "Get back in. I'm alone. What's wrong?"

FOR a moment she clung to him, trembling and groping for words. Then she tugged at his arm, urging him to the lighted room. She said, "Slim, I'm so ashamed. I don't know what to say. But that—" She gestured toward the table. "That'll prove—but don't ever tell dad!"

She did not seem to know her father was dead. He regarded her disheveled hair, the torn blouse that trailed in tatters, exposing a good deal more than she realized. But as she hid her face on his shoulder, Slim's eyes fairly popped out of his head.

On the table were bills of sale, which he recognized from their legal appearance. There were a dozen squares of rawhide, cut from as many freshly peeled hides. Each piece had the Diamond C brand!

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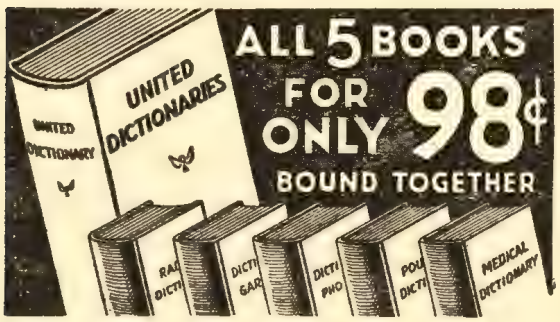

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"When we quarreled that night," she went on, haltingly, "I was furious. But the next night—oh, I hate to say it, but I learned that dad was beefing your cattle. To get even for that fence you cut. And for good measure—well, I realized why he'd bought me so many nice things, so suddenly. So I left, Wednesday night. To steal evidence, in Paso del Norte. I tricked a watchman there, and—"

She flushed, grimaced wryly. But Slim didn't notice that. He was too busy with his thoughts. While her father faced fatal bullets on the Diamond C, Madge had been in Paso del Norte, on the prowl. Slim demanded, "You mean you was fixing to sell your own pappy to the law? Why—" He thrust her from him. "Why—you damned low down—"

"Slim, don't look at me that way! Don't you understand, I came to throw this stuff in through a window. But no one was in. So I put it here, where he'd find it. There's nothing against father, only against Burt Kenyon. A politician, beef contractor, saloon owner."

"Oh." Slim understood. "Trying to save your pappy, huh?"

"More than that! Trying to get him out of crookedness and revenge. I'd begun to see the cattleman's side of it."

Then Slim's misery returned a hundredfold. Madge was honest to the core, and brave as they made them. And he had killed her father. He didn't know what to say or do. Even if it never leaked out, he could not face her. The glow in her eyes burned him when she went on, "You and I can make

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peace between our parents, can't we, Slim? I hated you for what you said, but it set me thinking."

"Sit down, honey," he muttered, sinking into a chair.

"I can't. I've got to get home to dad. I'll lie out of it, somehow, so he won't suspect, right away, what I did."

"I'll ride with you." Slim could not evade the issue, or let her go to an empty cabin, to wait until the news reached her. "I got—uh—a heap—to tell you."

She regarded his drawn face. She sensed something was dreadfully wrong, and apprehension gripped her. "Slim, what is it? Tell me now. Right here!"

But Slim had no chance to explain. A rifle blast and the shattering of glass were sounds prolonged by Madge's scream. His side went numb. He did not realize that the distortion of the pane had spoiled the marksman's aim. Other slugs thudded against the heavy walls, and sprayed the room with flying splinters.

AS HE went for his .45, Madge snatched a poker and swept the lamp from the table. It crashed in the fireplace. She smothered the blazing kerosene with cushions from the lounge. Slim steadied his pistol barrel on the sill to squeeze lead at the tongues of flame that spurted from the woodpile and from the corner of the barn.

When the fusillade slowed down to futile sniping, Madge crept to Slim's side and said, "We can slip out the other side. There's only four shooting at us."

"We can't," he muttered. "They got my hoss and yourn. It's too close to dawn, anyway. We'd not get far."

A man shouted from the murky shadows, "Throw out those papers, and we'll go away."

Slim leveled the Winchester Madge had located. As he did so, he thought, "Gawd, if I had dad's buffler gun, I'd bust hell outen the grindstone that son is hiding behind." He fired, heard the futile

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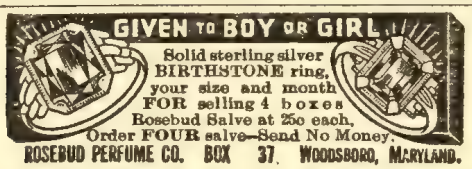
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There was a furtive stirring outside, but gloom still protected the besiegers. Slim did not realize what was in the wind until he smelled burning hay. Flames first yellowed, then reddened the gaping door of the barn.

Dry as it was, it would go up like gunpowder. Worse than that, the first gray of dawn brightened the open ground. If he or Madge tried to make a break on foot, they would be hunted down.

The barn was smartly ablaze. Choking fumes billowed in through the broken window. Gusts of furnace heat lashed the besieged. At any moment, Slim expected the shingles to catch afire over his head. And the flames would now expose him, whichever direction he tried for flight.

"Honey," he choked, catching her hand, "you try slipping out yonder whilst I go out, shooting, tother way. You got a chanct!"

"I won't," she said. "It's my father's fault all this is happening. If you're killed, I'll feel like a murderer, and he'll be one!"

That whipped Slim to desperation. He caught her shoulder, shook her violently. "You damn little fool, get out! Your pappy's dead. I shot him the night you was

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in Paso del Norte. I didn't know 'twas him that was beefing our critters, but I kilt him!"

Horror widened her eyes. He repeated, "I kilt him. Now git out; you got no call to stick with me. Git, you fool, I'm going out a-shooting!"

He had found and loaded a second .45. Gun in each hand, he bounded toward the side furthest from the fire. He had thrust the evidence in his shirt. Grimly he saw that his death would still nail Kenyon. The'd not search his riddled carcass; they'd assume the evidence had gone up in smoke. But when the old man found him, they'd be sunk, the ——s!

Though four men had circled to await his break, regardless of direction, he still caught them momentarily off guard. His long legs seemed to cover yards at a stretch as he zigzagged, ducked, guns blazing for an instant, then silent during another bound. The enemy fired as they concentrated to cut off his flight.

Lead whipped past him. One of the raiders jerked back, and lurched into the open. Then Slim caught a glimpse of big Burt Kenyon. He shifted, spraying lead. He missed, and a hammer impact from the other flank made him spin, numb and helpless; his guns would not work any more.

Kenyon shouted, "Where's the girl? You, Hubbell! Doran!"

"Watch it!" someone howled above the roaring flames.

KENYON ducked. Somewhere, Madge screamed, but no one heard. Pounding hoofs shook the

(Continued on page 117)

Can SEX Take A Holiday?

Do a man's sex needs cease when he is given a number instead of a name? Every grown person knows that the answer to this question is "NO!"—yet until now no one has dared to tackle the problem of SEX LIFE IN PRISONS with fearless realism! The amazing book illustrated below proves how hopeless it is to expect sex to take a holiday. It reveals with astonishing candor what happens to the sex passions of prisoners—how normal desires become *abnormal*—how SEX becomes to convicts a wild need ready to kill, to mutilate in order to find satisfaction!

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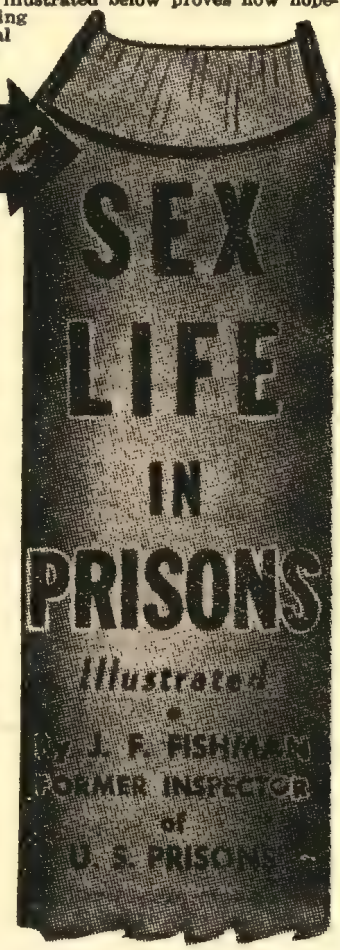
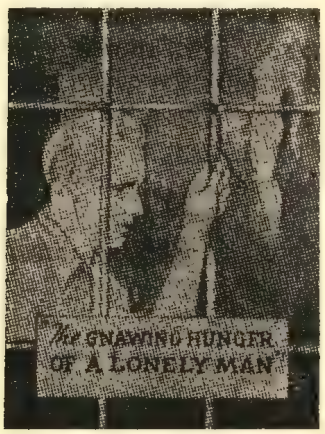


DO CONVICTS REMAIN SEXUALLY SANE?

Now at last the greatest authority on prison life in America has pulled aside the veil of hypocrisy, and revealed the facts of sexual degeneracy among convicts. J. F. Fishman, for 18 years Federal Inspector of Prisons, has dared to lay the truth before the American public. Nothing like this has ever before been published—nowhere in all the literature of America is there such a candid, frank and fearless expose of this great social evil—the depraving and degenerating influence of prison life on convicts. Dr. Harry Elmer Barnes, world's famous sociologist and historian, says, "If one were consciously to plan an institution perfectly designed to promote sexual degeneracy he would create the modern prison." That is the situation which until this book was published, was hidden by a hush-hush policy of prudery!



Now the truth is exposed! Inspector Fishman visited more than 3500 prisons and jails in an official capacity representing the United States Government. In SEX LIFE IN PRISONS he reveals publicly for the first time mountains of confidential and inside information, facts and case histories.

A Burning Social Problem

Day after day newspapers throughout the country report brutal sex crimes committed by ex-convicts. What is to be done about it? Sudden assaults, rape, degrading self-abuse, trickery, bribery, homosexuality, exhibitionism, lesbianism—what a sorry list of perversions result from prison life! It took daring indeed to reveal these truths without camouflaging them—but only a daring expose can rouse the public to meet this burning social problem. You may shudder or be shocked when you read these pages but you will have a much better understanding of the dangers that lurk in every community, of why there are so many innocent sex crime victims.

Startling Facts About Sex Intrigues

It is truly amazing what queer practices prisoners will attempt to gain sexual gratification. No detective stories, no mere brain-created thrillers equal these bizarre escapades. The characters and plots of fiction are pale indeed alongside these true stories! Only life itself, twisted and distorted by the unnatural conditions of prison existence could produce such unbelievable episodes.

Here are a few of the topics covered in this big 256-page book (with 6 full-page illustrations): Sex Life in the Army and Navy—In boarding schools—Punishment for homosexual practices in the Navy—Sex fantasies of prisoners—Sex problems of female inmates—Male wardens of female prisons—Desperate daring of sex starved convicts—An astonishing case history—Women's tricks—Male workmen in female quarters—An ingeniously arranged affair—Exhibitionism—Intimacies of officials with female criminals—The "third sex"—Vicious "courting" of innocents by "wolves"—Catching them in the act—"Crazy with passion"—Why the open shower room was abolished—The "Kangaroo Court"—Spread of disease in prisons—Sex dreaming—Tantalizing memory fantasies—Prevalent abnormal practices—Do prisoners' wives remain faithful?—A startling innovation for solving the problem.

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"The author lays bare a topic that too often has been spoken of in whispers, or altogether ignored." That is what Prof. Sheldon Glueck, of Harvard University Law School, says of SEX LIFE IN PRISONS. He continues: "It was high time that someone should tell the plain, unvarnished tale unfolded in this book. . . . A realistic stripping of the veil from a situation that needs to be aired." Dr. G. Kirchwey, former Warden of Sing Sing, says, "A book of courage and insight by one who knows the prisons."

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The Woman Nobody Knows

(Continued from page 53)

was going to pop. She said, "You attend to your own business! What right have you to tell me what to do?"

He laughed. "Right? I've every right in the world! The man's no good. You leave him alone or you'll be sorry. Another thing I don't like you parading around half dressed like you've been doing!"

Whack goes her palm against his cheek! That George was no man for a girl to slap, although he didn't kiss her like he had Lisbeth. Instead he grabbed her and shook hell out of her.... Then before she could get her breath back, he flopped her over his knees and gave her a darn good paddy-whacking. And that little nightie of hers wasn't any protection at all, believe you me!

Afterward back in the bunkhouse I got pretty sore. I said to myself: Limpy, what did he mean, he had every right to tell her what to do? Dern it, the two timing snake! And I thought he was a better man than Dancy! And instead he's a worse chaser than Dancy hisself!

So the next morning I wouldn't even take a cigarette when he offered it to me. I smoked a couple of Mary Smith's instead.

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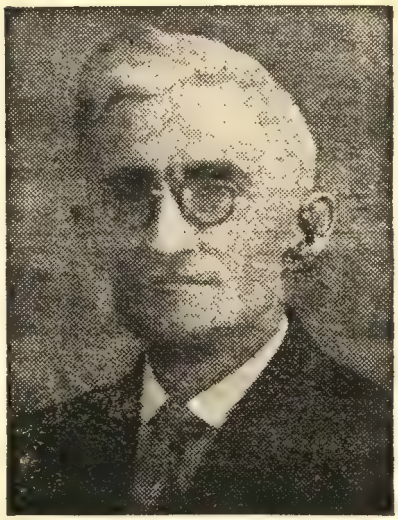

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Mr. Jos. Weaver, Hopewell, Virginia, writes: "I must say that the Prosager is worth its weight in gold a thousand times. Money wouldn't buy mine, that is, if I could not get another."

Mr. W. Scott Lane, Leeds, Maine, states: "The Prosager is doing wonders for me."

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AS USUAL, McAdams and the Professor and Miss Candace and Dancy saddled up for the morning ride. I sent George down in the south pasture to look after something or other, mostly because it's a hard ride, and I saw to it that Lisbeth stayed at the house. That left me and Mary Smith to talk things over at the barn. She was a right smart girl, that Mary.

But about eleven thirty all hell broke loose. A horse came galloping into the barnyard with someone swaying and weaving in the saddle. I ran out and pulled him off and, dern it, it was the Professor! He was all blood covered from a gash in his head and so excited he couldn't hardly talk. He yelled, "Where's Mr. Tedford and Miss Smith? Quick, get me to them, McAdams has gone crazy!"

We got him in the house and poured a drink down him. He bawled like a branded calf, babbling, "We were riding along talking when I felt my cinch giving and I asked Dancy to fix it! While he was leaned over, McAdams wheeled by and hit him in the head with a gun butt! Then he turned the gun on me and Miss Candace and made us ride down into the *malpais* with him. He's a madman, I tell you! He'd have killed me only he wanted to use me. He made me promise to give this letter to Miss Smith!"

He sucked at his whiskey again and Miss Smith very calmly took the letter and opened it. Dern her, her hands didn't even shake. She read it aloud. "Miss Smith: I know who your companion is. I am a desperate man and will not hesitate to kill her unless you follow

instructions. You have two days to raise $100,000 in small bills. When you have the money attach a white flag to the flagpole and have the Professor bring it to the cairn of rocks on Indian Butte. There he will find other instructions. I'm desperate and all hell can't stop me. McAdams."

Miss Smith said, calm like, "Where's the phone?"

"What you going to do?" bleated the Professor. "Call the police? He'll kill her, I tell you he's desperate!"

She answered, "Certainly not! I'm going to make arrangements for the money!" She was the calmest of us all, I tell you. And while she was phoning, in came Dancy with the same story, only he wasn't sure who hit him. He came to and couldn't find the party so he rode home without them!

Pretty soon George came in and heard what had happened. He began to ask questions like he was a Pinkerton man and somehow or other everybody answered them right sudden. He was a new George, a George that I hadn't seen. Him and Mary Smith walked out to the barn by themselves and began talking things over.

Dancy was just like a kid that had lost its candy. He kept yelling, "We got to do something! I love her and she loves me and we're going to get married. I won't lose her!" What he meant was he

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Lisbeth felt pretty bad, I tell you, and George was too danged busy to comfort her. Not that I'd have let him anyway.

I went out to the bunkhouse playing a hunch and dug in my warbag. Sure enough, I had the letters and papers McAdams had dropped the night he tried to commit suicide. And one of them was a letter telling him he'd have to make up a hundred thousand dollar deficit in his business or go to jail! No wonder he took a chance on kidnaping the richest girl in the world!

I'LL say this for Mary Smith—she got action. Long about three in the morning a plane landed east of the big pasture and when it took off, ten minutes later, Mary had a suitcase with a hundred thousand dollars in small bills! Dancy came to me and licked his lips and he said, "Limpy, did you ever stop to think how grateful Candace would be to the fellow that rescued her?"

I knew what he meant. He meant he'd be a hero and she'd *sure* marry him, her and all that money. But the idea he had wasn't so bad.

So we talked it over with the Professor and he was so scared he agreed! Here was our plan. Me and Dancy would sneak away now, in the dark and get pretty close to that butte. McAdams no doubt had a spy glass but he couldn't see us in the dark. We'd have a good start before the others ran up the white flag to show they had the money. As soon as the professor showed up at the Butte with the money, we could pick off Mc-

Adams, if he showed, or stay hidden if the new instructions said for the professor to go back to the Boxed T. Simple, wasn't it? That's what *we* thought!

So we rode off right after false dawn, keeping to the brush, until we got fairly close to the cairn of rocks on Indian Butte. Pretty soon, few minutes after sun up, here came the Professor picking his way along on a horse, the handbag tied to the saddle horn.

He stopped at the cairn of rocks, looked sort of bewildered, then suddenly he reached down and picked up a piece of paper. He didn't let on he knew we were covering him up. Dancy was shaking there in the sage beside me, and I got my gun in my hand ready to cut loose if Adams showed up. But he didn't. Instead the Professor scratched his head, got on his horse and headed over the *malpais away* from the ranch. We had to give him a start, then we followed on foot, keeping down much as we could.

It was plenty hard going over them sharp rocks and once or twice I thought Dancy would quit. "Think of all them millions, Dance," I told him and he come along quicker.

Pretty soon we got to a sort of a deep cut that narrowed down to a three foot entrance in solid rock. Both of us hung back, not wanting to go first, I reckon, so I finally went tiptoeing on, Dancy right at my elbow. We stepped into a sort of room, the tops of the side cliffs almost touching for a ceiling. And there, right before our eyes, tied down on a crude cot was Miss Candace!

She hadn't been treated very nice, you could tell that! Most of her clothes had been stripped off her, and she was all bruised and scratched.

She gasped, "Dancy!"

Dancy yelled, "Sweetheart! I've saved you!"

He started running toward her, and from a rock niche behind me came a voice saying, "Very pretty! Just drop the guns, both of you. Easy, you fools!"

SURE, we dropped them, Dancy quicker than me. You'd have never known the Professor. He

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didn't have that questioning look in his eyes now, and he didn't look potbellied nor nothing. He just looked mean, a big gun in each hand, his blue lips pulled back from his teeth.

He laughed all the time Dancy was tying me up, and he laughed even harder while he was hog tying Dancy.

He said, "So you thought McAdams hit you yesterday morning, dimwit? McAdams didn't! I did!"

I said, "You and McAdams was partners, hanh?"

And he laughed again and said, "I never work with a partner. McAdams is dead. I shot him right after I hit Dancy."

So old Dancy, he began to blubber. He wailed, "Don't kill me, mister. Honest to God I won't tell on you! Let me go and I'll keep still! I'll even leave the country! Don't kill me!"

Me, all I could think of was Miss Candace. An old man don't mind dying much, but she was young. So I asked him.

"What do you think?" he sneered. "Certainly she'll have to die. They'll think the Professor was killed too, and the body hidden. Oh, it's quite safe."

You couldn't hardly hear him for Dancy's blubbering. The Professor walked over and kicked him still. He sneered at him, "I've been watching you ever since I came to the Boxed T. The big bad west, where men are men! Bah! You sniveling rat! I'm a scientist, Spencer, and I'm going to give you a chance for your life!"

"I'll do anything," wailed Dancy, "anything!"

Calmly the Professor took a

(Continued from page 108)

ground. Slim, recovering a little, saw two riders charging hell bent. His old man and Whitey Harris, a cowpuncher, had been attracted by the flames. They could not have distinguished pistol shots from the crackle of blazing wood, tinder-dry.

They were riding into a trap. Slim tried to yell, tried to shoot. God, wouldn't they see it was more than just a fire!

Kenyon, thinking Slim finished, was turning his fire on old man Crane. Hubbell's gun was dancing. The two riders piled from their saddles, pulling iron as they dropped; but the roll of the ground was their only cover. The raiders' slugs kicked up spurts of dust. Answering fire whistled over Slim's head; the buffalo gun was roaring.

Then Slim cocked his gun with his teeth. He yelled a challenge, and as Kenyon jerked up, the kid's .45 did its work. And the smack of a Winchester, tying into the roar of the Colt, cleared the deck.

Madge, coming out of the house, flung the rifle on the ground.

"It was empty," she cried, "and I fumbled the shells till the last second. Why didn't you wait?"

Slim staggering toward his father, hailed Whitey Harris. The cowpuncher, wounded by that first volley, was clawing a red splash on his chest. "We seen the blaze," he choked.

Madge caught him as he sagged. He thrust her aside. "Look to Dad Crane, he's damn neart finished."

Slim knew that, even before Whitey spoke. The old man forced a grin, tried to speak, then slumped in a heap. Madge, now at Slim's side, caught his arm. "Are you hurt bad? What can I do?"

The kid's drawn face twitched. "Fix Whitey. I just got a rib knocked loose and my shoulder drilled. And what the hell you doing here? I told you—I told you what I'd gone and done. Get out, I can't stand looking at you. You know what I done!"

"I know." Her lovely face was pained and weary. Tears gleamed in her eyes, and cut white paths through the dust and smoke stain of her cheeks. She shook her head, very slowly. "First I couldn't believe you. Then I went wild, but when I got the gun loaded—Slim, I couldn't hate you enough, so I fired at them, instead."

"Uh—what?" He couldn't believe all the implications.

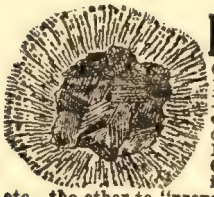
"No," she solemnly went on. "All this, tonight, is what my father's pardners led him into, using his resentment for their own gains. Look what you've lost—from *our* fault—"

Slim scratched his battered head. "Honey, you forgiving me, you mean?"

"You didn't do it on purpose, and he was in the wrong. You and I can't carry on a feud. We've no relatives to keep it up."

Something told Slim that some day she could smile at him, and that she would. His own grief left him too numb for hatreds, and perhaps she felt that way, too.

"Honey," he finally said, "you can't fight a woman, so the feud's off, if you see things thataway. Orphants ought to stick together."



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knife from his belt, leaned over and cut Dancy's bonds. Then he stepped back and tossed the knife at Dancy's feet!

"Peculiar as it may seem," he laughed, "I'm a little squeamish about killing women. I believe it's bad luck. Now, big bad man of the west, pick up that knife and walk over to that cot."

Like a man in a dream Dancy picked up the knife and went to the cot. Candace moaned and said, "No! No!" I yelled at him, too, and the Professor grinned like a wolf.

He said, "I give you my word on this, Dancy, so think well. You can use that knife to cut her bonds. If you do that, she goes free—and you stop a bullet with the back of your head. But if you'll plunge it in her breast, *you* go free!"

I tell you you could have heard a feather drop. Except for Dancy's breathing as the knife went closer and closer to that soft flesh that was her shrinking breast, there wasn't a sound in the little cave! Then Miss Candace moaned.

And a voice said, "Hold it!" Like the crack of a whip.

THE Professor whirled and snapped a shot. There was George standing spraddle legged in the entrance, his guns smoking, and the Professor was a danged sieve when he hit the floor, dead as hell.

Candace screamed, "Don't touch me, don't let him touch me!" Dancy stepped back gibbering and after I got loose I went over and let Miss Candace loose.

She flung her arms around my neck, and then jumped for George,

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yelling, "George, George, he'd have stuck me with that knife."

Dancy tried to pull her away, hollering, "I was going to cut you loose, honey, I was going to save you." He sure saw a hundred million slipping away.

George let loose of her and swung a six shooter right against Dancy's mouth. He plumb ruined a set of pretty teeth. Dancy looked up from the floor spitting out teeth and whimpering. George just said, "Git! And never mind showing up near the ranch, either."

Old Dancy loped out of that canyon like a hound that just tangled with a porkypine! If he'd have had a tail, it would have been between his legs.

Riding back I had the Professor tied on behind me, but I couldn't help thinking about Lisbeth. For Miss Candace rode double with George kissing him and a hugging him and telling him how wrong she'd been all along! So when we got back home and George slipped out of the saddle and caught Lisbeth in his arms and held her even tighter than Miss Candace, I just pulled my old hogleg and threw down on him.

I said, "George, I thank you for joining the party in time to save my life, but outside of that I think you're the two-timenest snake that ever wore a pair of California britches! You better talk quick. How come you ride fast and loose with two women's affections?"

I looked over to where big Mary Smith had her arms around Miss Candace. She grinned and said, "Limpy, old timer, let me explain. The richest girl in the world has to be darned careful whenever she

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goes anyplace. To be plain and open and frank with you, I'm Candace Prevost, the richest girl in the world. This—" she pointed a finger at the one I'd thought was Candace—"is the real Mary Smith Jones, my secretary, and incidentally George's young sister. And maybe it'd interest you to know that George has been my bodyguard for the last six years." She looked to where George and Lisbeth were in a clinch with no holds barred. "But it looks," she admitted, "like I'm going to have to find a new one somewhere. Have a Camel?"

I did.

That night at the supper table after all the county sheriffs and coroners had raised ned, right in the middle of the soup I bust out laughing. I laughed till I cried. I must have blew soup all over that table and nobody seemed to care. Finally the Woman Nobody Knew said, "What in the world, Limpy?"

And I said, "I'm thinking about Dancy Spencer. All his life he's going to think how close he came to marrying ten million dollars! And all the time he was backing the wrong horse."

Then they all laughed.

Siren of Santa Fe

(Continued from page 41)

tering it, sprawling in the wreckage as Dona screamed. The wrinkled woman came running, adding her voice to the din. Mis-

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souri leaped again, slammed Galloway's head against the floor, twisted his fingers on the man's throat.

Something crashed against his head. Fragments of pottery fell on the floor. He blinked and shook his tawny hair like a spaniel just out of water. He tightened his grip on Galloway's gullet, and banged Galloway's head on the floor again and again.

Dona came with another vase. He warded off the blow with one arm, throttling his man with the other. Dona leaped on him, scratching and biting with the fury of a Mexican panther.

Missouri rose to his feet and flung her from him. At the sight of him, tall and broad shouldered, masterfully striding toward her, the wrinkled woman fled, and Dona collapsed in a sobbing heap of spent fury.

"You little hell cat!" Missouri gritted. "Turnin' on me when I was tryin' to help you! So, you took his money, eh? Know whose money that was? Know whose plaid shawl that is on the chair? It's mine! Galloway robbed me. And now I'm takin' it back—understand?"

She sobbed more loudly. Missouri stepped to the chest, pulled open a drawer. There were jewels and trinkets heaped high in a jumbled disarray. There was a canvas money bag, too—his money bag. Most of it was gone, but the clinking of the gold pieces told him a couple of thousand dollars might be left.

He stuffed it into the buckskin shirt. "When Galloway comes to, tell him I collected!" he said, and went out the door.

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A hue and cry lifted at the plaza, even as he set foot in the narrow street. Missouri clamped his jaw hard and went up the sidewalk in a run. The moon was riding high; they could see him blocks away. The candlelight in Josefa's window told him she was waiting—

As he neared the house, a musket cracked behind him. The ball hammered adobe from the wall. Missouri leaped for the vines, pulled himself toward the balcony.

Another shot sent a yard-long streak of flame blazing from the shadows at the corner of the plaza. Then a dozen soldiers were shouting, clamoring after him.

"Darling!" Josefa cried, and flung her arms around his neck as he stepped through the window. He found her lips and the ecstasy cushioned there; he was oblivious to the musket ball that rattled against the roof.

THEN men hammered at the door. Missouri sprang to the window. He felt able to whip any dozen of these nondescript troops, given a fair chance. But there was Josefa, and there were the servants below—

"Is there a back way?" demanded the Missourian. Josefa nodded, her velvety-black eyes large with excitement, soft with love for him.

"And the horses are there, waiting!" she said.

Missouri reached in his buckskin shirt, lifted out the sack of gold coin. He dipped out a liberal handful, leaned over the balcony and yelled.

Muskets jerked up at him, but the gold glistened in the moonlight

and scattered in a tinkling shower, wide on the ground. There were shouts and a scramble. Missouri grabbed Josefa's saddlebags in one arm, and Josefa in the other. They hurried out the rear way, and reached the horses in the corral.

A *mozo* had saddled them. Missouri had never seen sleeker, swifter-looking horses. He tossed another gold piece to the *mozo*, and swung Josefa into her saddle.

As they streaked into the moonlight, a solitary musket sent a ball whistling over their heads. The rest of the foot soldiers were still fighting over the windfall of gold.

At the top of Glorieta range, Missouri drew rein to let the horses breathe, and to lean from his saddle and fold the loveliest girl in old Sante Fe to his heart. Over her dark hair, cushioned against his shoulder, he looked down on the scattered lights of the sprawling pueblo, and sighed. Only six hours before, he had ridden down that slope, into the town that was trail's end.

There were things he would have admired to see, in Santa Fe, things he had looked forward to seeing during eight hundred miles of wilderness. Womanless wilderness. Missouri grinned, and lifted Josefa's face for a kiss.

"We'll find a priest in Taos, sweetheart," he told her. "And then we'll ride on. Back to St. Louis. It's a wonderful town on the big river, with boats runnin' down to New Orleans and wagon trains comin' west to Independence and on out here. It's at the end of the Santa Fe trail!"

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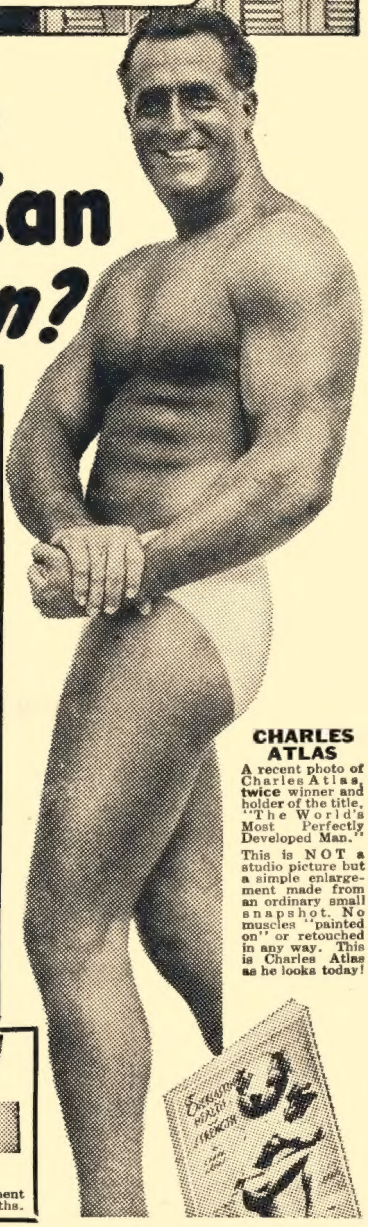

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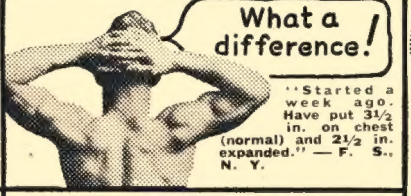

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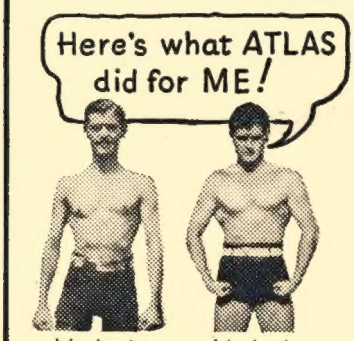

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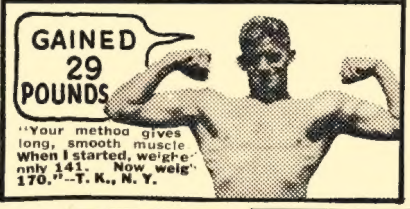

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